

BELISARIUS

BELISARIUS GENERAL OF THE EAST

BY

JOHN PRESLAND

AUTHOR OF "MARCUS AURELIUS," "THE DELUGE," ETC.



LONDON
CHATTO & WINDUS
1913

All rights reserved.

ACT IV.

SCENE I.—*A Hall of Justice; at the back a curtained alcove concealing JUSTINIAN; in the centre POMPEIUS is seated, facing him are BELISARIUS on the left and ISAAC on the right. JUSTUS is beside BELISARIUS as his counsel; JULIAN, THEODORE, and DEMETRIUS act as witnesses; there are two Scribes taking notes. As the scene opens ISAAC is speaking.*

ISAAC. These are the causes which impelled me, sir,
To bring an accusation into court
Against this man, called Belisarius,
Also at one time General of the East,
And Consul for his year; those favours heaped
The Emperor on his unworthy head
That he stood highest of all citizens,
Until he did aspire above the level
Of citizenship to be Emperor.

BELISARIUS. Protest against that, Justus.

JUSTUS (*producing a paper*).

I protest.

The accusation says no word at all

ACT I.

SCENE.—*A wide, handsome street in Byzantium, flanked either side with colonnades, under which shops are seen, and where a crowd of idlers loaf on the steps or against the columns. In the background is the Golden Gate with its guard-house, round which is a disorderly mob of soldiers, going in, coming out, ordered first in this direction, and then in that, by their officers ; messengers arriving and departing ; a scene of bustle and disorder.*

SERGIUS and MARCELLUS conversing earnestly in one
of the porches.

MARCELLUS. So hated is he, Sergius, these days,
That all we need do is to take a stand
In any street or forum in the city,
And cry for his successor, and the people
Would plump their votes for anyone we chose,
And push Justinian down.

SERGIUS. Hush, not so loud !
Although I think his popularity
Wanes, as his taxes and his years increase
There always will be busybodies round
To carry news where they'll be paid for it.

BELISARIUS

ACT I

MARCELLUS. Pooh! they're too busy with this last report
Of Zabergan's advance through Thrace, and wreck
Of towns and villages, to notice us,—
And that's to our advantage!—Here's the time
To rid us of this peasant Emperor.
His young years were unpopular enough,
When all the victories of Africa,
And Italy, and Persia, others won,
Made a fictitious splendour round him. Now,
His taxes multiplied like Jacob's sheep,
And this corruption of his officers,
Which he wants strength to check—

SERGIUS. And, I believe,
The will to profit by.

MARCELLUS. What good is that?
It's with his knowledge, if not with his will
They farm out office, and the wretched poor
Of the streets and country pay the final drop
Cruelty and greed can wring from them. Be sure,
This is the time for a decisive blow,
When all Byzantium has gone distraught
About these Huns and Slavs.

SERGIUS. I do not think so,
A city threatened by barbarians,

Ruled by an Emperor of eighty years
Invites less plots than prayers.

MARCELLUS. As for the city,
'Twill buy its safety, as its betters do,
With women's knick-knacks and the portly hoard
Our good householder hides behind his wall.
Come, Sergius, you're surely not afraid
Of these wild Slavs a-tearing through the streets,
Clutching with one hand to your bristling hair,
And with the other——
(*Draws his hand across his throat.*)
Grh! A pig's death.

SERGIUS. Ugh!
These things are too uncomfortably near
In Thrace——

MARCELLUS. Unfortified, small villages,
Byzantium's impregnable, intact,
A virgin city—save the word! Take heart;
Those pretty, inlaid, ivory beds of yours
Don't creak yet under hairy savages.

SERGIUS. I am as brave as all my neighbours are,
However big they talk, while sheltering
Behind a soldier's back, and through the crook
Of his elbow making faces at a foe
They half despise, and yet fear all the time.

BELISARIUS

ACT I

MARCELLUS. Well countered, friend ! But as for sheltering
Behind a soldier ; devil give us grace,
For nothing gives us soldiers.

*(Pointing to the mob of gaudily dressed and gesticulating
officers at the Golden Gate.)*

Look at those !

Their gilding's the most precious part of them,
And that's eked out with brass ; they've gamed away
Or pawned the gold. You see that precious pair,
Mopping and mowing to each other's noses ;
They're Martian and Demetrius, great men,
Lights o' the camp, Clarissimi !—God knows,
Not I !—But, anyway, they are the pair
That should assure the safety of our necks
Against the Northerners ; my neck would ache
If they were all the surety.

SERGIUS.

Lights o' the camp !

I doubt if they have known as many drills
As Belisarius has battles.

MARCELLUS.

Hum !

SERGIUS. I know that you dislike him ; but there's one
Who should be called in this emergency,
Being the greatest soldier of our times,
Or any times.

MARCELLUS. Oh, Belisarius !
He's in his dotage, underneath the thumb
Of Madam Antonina, his shrew wife,
And boon companion to that other slut,
The Empress Theodora.

SERGIUS. Hush !

MARCELLUS. I say,
Whatever virtues he has ever had,—
Which I do question—long since rusted out
In dull obscurity.

SERGIUS. He's out of favour,
Who never much was in, and comes to Court
Only when he's obliged, to face the sneers,
And slights, and insults. I have thought, Marcellus,
He had such cause to hate the Emperor
He might have loved our plan.

MARCELLUS. Not he, the slave !
He loves the kicks and buffets he receives
From the Imperial foot. He could refuse
The crown of Italy from the conquered Goths,
And not refuse, when he was treated here,
With grudging praise, and lack of confidence,
Spying, and lying ; he's too poor of spirit
To risk his neck now.

BELISARIUS

ACT I

SERGIUS. Risk! You swore to me
There was no risk. Did you not swear, Marcellus,
No one would lift a finger on behalf
Of old Justinian?

MARCELLUS. No more they will,
But, since we've fixed on Justin as his heir,
There may be blows if any relative,
Nephew, or cousin, tries to force his claim
Against our candidate.

SERGIUS. You kept that dark;
And I've no fancy for the usual fate
Of who conspire and fail.

MARCELLUS. Forget it, then,
As being a matter barely possible.
But who comes here?

Enter ANASTASIUS.

SERGIUS. Anastasius,
A nephew, cousin, grandson, what you will,
Of the late Empress.

MARCELLUS. He's a likely bird;
Little beholden to the Emperor.

SERGIUS. Speak to him, then, but carefully at first.

MARCELLUS. Good-morning, Anastasius.

ANASTASIUS.

Good-day.

I pray you, have you seen my father-in-law?

SERGIUS. Whom do you mean?

ANASTASIUS.

Lord Belisarius.

MARCELLUS. What! he's consented? You've the maid at last?

ANASTASIUS. No, sir; but we are promised to be wed

Within a day or two. The Emperor

Has given me a noble wedding gift

To match the lady's wealth. Wealth goes for nothing

To her or me, but it has pleased her mother,

Who so long had objected to my suit.

SERGIUS. *You* are in luck, though all the world cries "Woe!"
Felicitations!

ANASTASIUS.

Thanks, sir—many thanks!

You have not seen the General?

SERGIUS.

Not to-day.

ANASTASIUS. You will excuse me to go look for him?

Good-bye, good gentlemen.

[Exit ANASTASIUS.]

SERGIUS.

He walks on air;

There's little use to talk of plots to him

Whose mind is full of marriage.

MARCELLUS.

I will bet

The Emperor repudiates that present

BELISARIUS

ACT I

He promised Anastasius. Good gold
Is dearer than the scanty drops of blood
In his dry carcass.

SERGIUS. He'll but give us, then,
One more adherent.

MARCELLUS. I am sure of that.

Enter JUSTINIAN in a tinselled litter, accompanied by the retinue of his household, SOLOMON, ISAAC, THEODORE, JOHN, in the dress of a General, as are DEMETRIUS and MARTIAN, who advance to the EMPEROR, followed by an unruly crowd of Soldiers. Round the skirts of the royal party collects a miscellaneous mob of Cobblers, Fruit-sellers, Sweetmeat-sellers, etc. Everyone is pointing, gesticulating, arguing. JUSTINIAN sitting in his litter, dazed and wringing his hands. SERGIUS and MARCELLUS approach to listen, but remain apart.

ISAAC. I tell your Majesty there is no hope :
The enemy advanced through Thrace so fast
'Twas less like men than locusts, and the ruin
They left behind them was most locust-like.

JUSTINIAN. Oh Lord ! oh Lord ! oh Virgin ! pity me !
What shall be done ?

MARTIAN. Let all the gates be closed.
The city's being filled with such a crowd
(For all the country-side comes hurrying in

To put these walls between the Huns and them)
That we shall find our granaries as bare
As if the rats had been there. How should we
Support an arduous and protracted siege
With all those empty bellies and empty heads
To be provided for?

COBBLER (*pressing forward*). Ay, close the gates!
Where is our privilege as citizens
If we must have short commons, and go shares
With every gaping Hodge for miles around?

DEMETRIUS. Who is this chatterer?

COBBLER. My skin's as dear
To me as yours.

DEMETRIUS. Yours shall be pickled so
It will not clothe your body. Out you get!
(*The Cobbler is pushed back, but collects a ring round
him, whom he harangues.*)

JUSTINIAN. Let orders go at once to close the gates—
All of the gates; let them be closed at once!

THEODORE. A moment, most illustrious. Consider,
That if you close the gate you shut outside
The people—well, that's neither here nor there!—
But they'll be carrying their household goods,
Which so you leave for Zabergan.

BELISARIUS

ACT I

SOLOMON. Besides,
It is the wealthy who will come in first,
Having the most to lose.

JUSTINIAN. True, Solomon ;
Right-reasoned, Solomon ; right named, he ! he !

MARCELLUS (*aside to SERGIUS*). God and the angels ! here's a
ready wit.

SERGIUS (*aside to MARCELLUS*). Things look more dangerous
even than I feared.

JUSTINIAN. Did someone go with orders to the gates ?
Let him be stopped ! Go, you, and countermand ;
The gates shall not be closed.

COBBLER (*haranguing his circle*). Why should we starve,
Who sweat from spring to winter earning bread——
(*His voice is drowned.*)

JUSTINIAN. We must impose a gate-tax on all those
Entering the city ; that may help relieve
Our burdened treasury, hard put to it
To fortify the city.

DEMETRIUS. Fortify !
Where is the time, my lord ? You'll need the tax
To lubricate their manners, in some sort,
When you do treat with them.

SERGIUS (*aside to MARCELLUS*). Oh, scandalous !
Is this a *soldier* ?

MARTIAN. They'll not dare advance
Beyond the wall of Anastasius.

JUSTINIAN. Yes, we can trust in that.

DEMETRIUS. *I trust in gold.*
Can we find troops for twenty miles of wall,
Engines to man it—ay, and picks and spades
To patch the crumbling towers and gaping holes
That a blind beggar could not fail to find ?

MARTIAN. Demetrius speaks flowingly of gold ;
Doubtless he knows where he can lay his hand
Upon a well-filled chest, to help our lord
In this embarrassment.

DEMETRIUS. You lie, you beast !
You know that I can barely scrape a wage
To pay the servants that my state requires ;
While you !—the accusation of my wealth
Comes well from him, who is notorious
For making every petty post abroad
Pay well at home.

COBBLER (*his voice breaking in*). Why are we citizens
To stand and see such matters——

BELISARIUS

ACT I

JUSTINIAN.

Oh, dear God !

Can you not all be silent ? Martian,
And you, Demetrius, I do not doubt
You'll find us something to defray the cost
Of this excessive tribute.

SOLOMON.

My dear lord,

Far from me be all thought of sacrilege,
But were it not as well that you took charge
Of the gold and silver vessels of the churches
That lie outside the city ?

JUSTINIAN.

Excellent !

We'll keep them safely from the impious hands
Of these barbarians.

ARCHBISHOP.

I must protest,

My lord.

JUSTINIAN.

Would you, the father of the flock,
Give the rich fleeces to these Huns and Slavs ?

ARCHBISHOP. Despoil a church, my lord ?

JUSTINIAN.

Abandon treasure

Sacred to God ? Go, Solomon, at once.
Have certain of these sacred vessels housed
At St. Sophia, underneath the eye
Of our good father, and the rest of them

Stored in our treasury till better times ;
Let the collection of them be your charge.

SOLOMON (*bowing*). Humbly I thank you for your trust, my lord.

[*Exit* SOLOMON.]

THEODORE. There goes a lucky man !

DEMETRIUS. He has the knack
Of getting these appointments.

Enter a Soldier hurriedly.

SOLDIER. Give me room !
Let me come through you to the Emperor !

MARTIAN. Bad news of Zabergan ?

ISAAC. I told you so !

JUSTINIAN. Tell me the worst at once.

SOLDIER. He has advanced
Beyond the Anastasian wall unchecked,
And pitched his camp, not twenty miles from here,
At Melantias, upon the Athyras.

THEODORE. God's grace ! He will be here to-morrow then

SERGIUS. Nothing can save us !

JUSTINIAN. Now's the time to act !
Go you, Marcellus, and you, Theodore,
To treat with Zabergan——

BELISARIUS

ACT I

THEODORE. To treat with him ?
Have pity on your slave, most gracious lord,
And do not send me to be torn in shreds
By a vile barbarian, who does not pay
His debt to office.

JUSTINIAN. I'll safeguard you both,
But go you must; arrange with him what terms
He will agree to—this is ruin ! ruin !—
Yet terms you must make ; tempt his greediness
With promises of gold. Go, both of you.

A CARPENTER. Ay, promises of gold ! I know what fools
Will pay it ultimately ; these rich folk
Won't be the poorer paying Zabergan.

DEMETRIUS (*striking him*). Hold your tongue, insolent !

COBBLER. Insolent yourself !

(*A great hubbub, DEMETRIUS and the others beginning
to hit right and left in an angry crowd.*)

SOLDIER (*trying to be heard above the din*).

My gracious lord !—

DEMETRIUS (*drawing his sword*). Shall I take gutter words
From a dirty rascal ?

JUSTINIAN (*in senile fury*). I will hang you all
Unless you can be silent.

SOLDIER (*trying to be heard*). Gracious lord !—

JUSTINIAN. Silence! I say be silent! Bid those fellows
Take up my litter. To the palace! Go!

SOLDIER. Sir, I must speak, though I should lose my head.
Spies have reported that this Zabergan
Has grown so proud and confident, he swears
That nothing less than all Byzantium
Shall satisfy him.

MARCELLUS (*aside to SERGIUS*). Well, that shows some sense.
Why should he take a part for whom the whole
Is temptingly prepared?

MARTIAN. What now remains
Except to fortify the city?

DEMETRIUS (*mutters*). Ass!
That is impossible.

JUSTINIAN. It must be done.

COBBLER. I know *we* all shall starve.

MARTIAN. They will attack
Here, at the Golden Gate, most certainly.
I counsel that the soldiers should be drawn
From the other gates and towers, and massed here;
While a few simple slaves and citizens
Watch by the other gates, which are so strong
No mere barbarians would ever try
To force or scale them.

BELISARIUS

ACT I

JOHN. God! Is this mere folly,
Or wickedness as well? You draw your men
Away from Charsios or Rhegium;
And while you blow to keep your fingers warm
Here, by the Golden Gate, comes Zabergan,
And hops the wall, and takes you in the rear.

MARTIAN. This is the point of their attack, I say.

JOHN. And I say that you shall not have my men
For this mad-cat scheme; I will rather lock them
Up in their quarters.

DEMETRIUS. Fools, the two of you!
There aren't a thousand soldiers in the city
I'd trust to fight a farm-yard. Let who can
Take ship, and, with his coffers safe on board,
Off to some spot that's more salubrious.

JUSTINIAN. And let them sack my city?

DEMETRIUS (*shrugging*). My dear lord,
Since they will sack it if we let or no!

JUSTINIAN. Oh, for dear Narses! Would I had him here,
Who am an old man, and most vilely served;
He would not let you vultures plunder me,
Bold only in your shamelessness.

MARCELLUS (*to SERGIUS*). For once
He speaks no more than truth.

JUSTINIAN. Oh ! it is shameful that my heavy age
Should hear such counsels of rank cowardice,
Who, in my younger years, took Africa
And Italy to grace my diadem.

(BELISARIUS *appears at the back of the stage, conversing with ANASTASIUS.*)

COBBLER. There goes the General Belisarius ;
Ask what he thinks of this ?

JUSTINIAN. There's sometimes truth
Out of the vilest. Belisarius !
Narses is absent, but I'll conjure yet
With this man's name. Go, fetch him, one of you.

THEODORE. This dotard !

DEMETRIUS. Does his wife allow him walk
Without her on the street ?

CARPENTER. Why, here he comes.
Brave Belisarius !

COBBLER. God bless your honour !
(BELISARIUS *advances to JUSTINIAN'S litter.*)

BELISARIUS. You sent for me, my lord ?

JUSTINIAN. Dear General !
In this extreme need we have summoned you,
Who for so long adorned our sovereignty

BELISARIUS

ACT I

With victories; your age and services
Exempt you from more hardships, we well know,
Yet we are sure your loyalty will impel you
To don your armour once more in our cause.

BELISARIUS. My arm and brain are at your service, sir,
While either is of use.

ISAAC (*behind his hand, aside to DEMETRIUS*).

But mark the fool!

Why doesn't he protest his loyalty,
Which has been much in question?

DEMETRIUS.

Lack of wit.

JUSTINIAN. You are not ignorant that Zabergan
Threatens the city, and is now encamped
No further than Melantias, I fear.

BELISARIUS. Melantias! That's on the river-bank :
Well-chosen ground.

JUSTINIAN.

So, Belisarius,

We call on you to take supreme command
Of all our forces, with authority
Of ramparts, gates, and harbours; and we trust
That your great talent, which has served us often,
Will save us now.

BELISARIUS.

I thank your Majesty
For trusting me; I'll try to merit this.

JUSTINIAN. Take up my litter ; to the palace, go !

We leave our safety in those hands of yours.

BELISARIUS. One word before you go.

JUSTINIAN.

What ! more requests ?

BELISARIUS. Sir, if I've ever served you faithfully

Yourself should best remember—but that's nothing ;

I don't ask alms for my past services—

But there've been times in the unhappy past

When you have doubted me, have hampered me

With over-seers (spies I might have said

Except to save your ears) ; when I've received

Letters directing one thing, while my captains,

And my supposed subordinates, could quote

Other directions——

JUSTINIAN.

Will you use my need

To batter me with grievances long past ?

BELISARIUS. No, God forbid I should have grievances !

But let me be assured, before you go,

That I have absolute authority

Over the army—from the humblest wretch

Up to these gentlemen.

MARTIAN.

Your Majesty,

I do protest.

DEMETRIUS (*aside to MARTIAN*). You'd better hold your tongue,

BELISARIUS

ACT I

And let the old dog slaver out his spites ;
We've nipped him shrewdly in the past, you know.

JUSTINIAN. What would you do with them ?

BELISARIUS (*scornfully*). With them, my lord,
Nothing at all. Perhaps, had I your leave
I'd lock them up until my word was done ;
For in this crisis I must be assured
My orders are obeyed. I've cost you more
In men and treasure through my officers
Than my own luck could win.

JUSTINIAN. My rough old friend,
You have the right to speak thus grumblingly
After your years of loyalty. I give you
Complete authority on city, camp,
And provinces ; imprison anyone
Who disobeys you, though he were our heir.
How's that ?

BELISARIUS. Beyond my thanks or my deserts ;
But acts shall prove your trust was not misplaced.
Have I your leave to go ? Each hour wasted
Strengthens the enemy.

JUSTINIAN. Embrace me first.
You'll save me yet, my faithful General !

BELISARIUS. At least I will not live to see my failure.

BELISARIUS

ACT I

Out to the sunny porch—that's no good end
To a life of action. Well, to action now!

(To the three Generals who are about to exit into guard-room of Golden Gate.)

John! Martian! Demetrius! Come here.

MARTIAN. What! does he call us?

DEMETRIUS. Better go at once—
You heard the Emperor's orders.

JOHN. Did you call?
(They advance to BELISARIUS sullenly.)

BELISARIUS. Not to display an old authority
Over new persons, nor retaliate
For multifarious spites experienced:
Such things shall be forgotten if you'll act
As Roman soldiers.

MARTIAN. Surely you may trust us!

ANASTASIUS. Would that you surely might!

BELISARIUS. Here, Martian;
To you I shall entrust Byzantium
During my absence; you must man the walls
As best you can, plant frises in the moats,
And spikes before the gates; press all you can
Of shopmen, porters, fishers, to the walls—

Only for numbers, for you daren't allow
One shot to fall among them, or they'd run—
But they might make a show, pour oil and lead
Down on the enemy; I conjure you,
If only you do value your own life,
Let not your vigilance relax; should fate
Bring Zabergan before your walls at last,
The last resource they will be. Go at once.
See you obey me.

MARTIAN.

Need you sermonize?

[Exit MARTIAN.]

BELISARIUS. For you, my lords; we'll face the enemy
With what few troops the dull venality
Of these late days has left us.

DEMETRIUS.

You are mad

To venture out beyond the city walls,
Which are our sole protection; you know well
Our troops will never face the enemy.

BELISARIUS. Leave that to me.

DEMETRIUS.

You know what troops we have—

Undisciplined raw levies, strutting boys,
Who jingle spurs across a tavern floor,
But never saw blood, save in tavern brawls,

BELISARIUS

ACT I

A swollen nose or two ; you'll risk our lives
To lead this riff-raff !

BELISARIUS. There's my veteran guard
I can depend on. Go, Demetrius;
We start this afternoon.

DEMETRIUS. I cannot come ;
I have a fever on me ; I am sick.

ANASTASIUS. Ay, sick of fear, you coward.

BELISARIUS.
Go home, Demetrius, and lie in bed
With this same fever of yours, but if you show
Your face upon the street ere I return,
I'll have you scourged.

Let him be.

DEMETRIUS. But I am sick——

BELISARIUS (*turning his back*). No more :

I will not hear you ! get you home to bed ;

[DEMETRIUS *slinks out hurriedly.*

Now, John, is it your pillow, or your saddle?

One or the other, by the God of truth !

JOHN. I'll come with you, my lord.

BELISARIUS. That's so far well.
Make proclamation through the streets at once,
That all those who are fit to carry arms

Shall be in the Augusteum before noon,
Where I'll essay to band them orderly,
Where little order is.

JOHN. It shall be done.

[Exit JOHN.]

Enter ANTONINA and JOANNINA in a litter. ANTONINA descends hastily.

ANTONINA. And so, at last, the Emperor relents,
And looks upon us with more graciousness.

BELISARIUS. At least he's given me commands to beat
Zabergan, and his Huns!

ANTONINA. And in good time,
Or what I heard was wrong ; we should have had
Our houses toppling down about our ears.

BELISARIUS. You may have yet.

ANTONINA. So much the better odds
For you to fight with. Ah, that I could come,
As in the good old days in Italy !
But I'm too old, and I must stay at home
To play stern mentor to a love-sick girl.

BELISARIUS. We both look somewhat far back to our youth ;
No marvel should this be my last campaign.

ANTONINA. No fear of that, you're lucky.

BELISARIUS

ACT I

- ANASTASIUS. And besides,
Youth is as good a mark for death as age.
- JOANNINA. You both will leave us with such cruel words ?
- ANASTASIUS. Ah, Joannina !
- ANTONINA. Watch the amorous fools.
- ANASTASIUS. My lord and General, there are many ties
Of love and confidence between us now.
Give one more proof of confidence to-day,
And let me, calling Joannina wife,
Call you my father.
- BELISARIUS. What ! before we go ?
- ANASTASIUS. There's time to let us marry.
- ANTONINA. What's this folly ?
They'll wait till you return.
- ANASTASIUS. Madam, what harm
To let us call each other husband, wife,
Before we part ?
- ANTONINA. I will not have it so,
That is enough !
- ANASTASIUS. Speak, Joannina, you !
- JOANNINA. My mother knows the wishes of my heart.
- BELISARIUS. Does that not plead for her ?

ACT I

BELISARIUS

ANTONINA.

Enough of love !

There's other work for men.

(To JOANNINA) Come, you and I

Must home to prayers and needlework again ;

That's all we're fit for.

ANASTASIUS.

Give us leave at least

To say good-bye.

ANTONINA.

Oh, this philandering !

Say good-bye, Joannina ; say it, girl !

JOANNINA. Good-bye, my lover !

ANTONINA.

Now all's said and done ;

And I must shepherd home a weeping girl.

JOANNINA. I am not weeping. Father, let me say

" Be careful of him !"

BELISARIUS.

That's unworthy you.

Disaster almost breathes upon our face,

And if in giving up your lover's life

You stem the tide of death from many lovers,

Wives, little children, should you not be glad ?

JOANNINA. I will be glad ; forgive my selfish thought.

Take him and use him for the city's need,

I will not tell you " Spare him !"

BELISARIUS.

That's my girl !

Go with your mother. Anastasius,

BELISARIUS

ACT I

Summon my old guard to my palace gates ;
Then to the arsenal until I come,
To see that no one, for a penny or two,
Tampers with the accoutrements.

ANASTASIUS.

Yes, sir.

[ANASTASIUS *salutes and exits.*]

BELISARIUS. Go, Antonina ; no good-byes for me,
They drain our old heart's blood.

Enter UNIGATUS.

Ah, Unigatus !

Old horse, do you smell battle ?

[*Exeunt* ANTONINA and JOANNINA.]

UNIGATUS.

I have come

To give the remnant of my life and limb
To serve my General.

BELISARIUS.

You served him well

When you saved him, and won that empty sleeve.

UNIGATUS. I'll do as much one-handed, I can swear,
As others do with two.

BELISARIUS.

You must do more

Than most of our good soldiers ; we shall need
Some of the old tough metal in this lump,
Or it will buckle. There's my veteran guard.

And there is little else we may depend on.
Come with me now, I'll tell you of my plan ;
For if I can but find three hundred men
Of my old army, I'll prepare a play
That shall astonish this wild Zabergan.

[BELISARIUS *exit with his arm on UNIGATUS'S
shoulder.*

END OF ACT I.

ACT II.

SCENE I.—*The Augusteum, a large forum, with the Imperial Palace at the back; there is a glimpse of St. Sophia on the left, and the right leads to the Hippodrome; the columns of the Augusteum are decorated with wreaths and flowers.*

Enter UNIGATUS in full military dress, and MARCELLUS.

UNIGATUS. By God and all His angels, it's a shame!

I tell you, when we faced the enemy
We had three hundred soldiers—all the rest
Were slaves and shopmen; and the enemy
Were twenty thousand men that lived by war.
Were ever such odds heard of? Tell me that!

MARCELLUS. Never, it is incredible!

UNIGATUS. It's true!

So Belisarius illumines fires
A mile along our front, to give the Huns
A false idea of numbers; then he goes
With his old soldiers, trained in his campaigns
Under his eye—three hundred, as I said—
And leaving all the noisy crowd of fools

Hid in a wood, to shout and clash their arms,
And make a dust and pother, out he rides——

MARCELLUS. And so beat Zabergan? A miracle!

UNIGATUS. No less, no less; I tell you, on my oath
As a plain soldier, there's a genius,
A sort of glory shining round the man,
A visible power that burns on him like flame;
—I am a fool with words—but we, his soldiers,
Have felt it in past wars, yet never more
Than now in his old age.

MARCELLUS. The enemy
Felt it too, seemingly.

UNIGATUS. Be sure they did.
His voice is like a trumpet to your soul,
Speaking of daring; he rides steadily,
A light hand on the reins, no fevered knee.

MARCELLUS. Well, we may say our prayers in safety now.

UNIGATUS. Prayers at such a time! They broke and fled
Before our charge, those fierce barbarians,
Like rooks before the farmer, harvest-time;
But then, before the general could advance,
Finish his work, and harry them from Thrace,
There comes a message from the stay-at-homes
Safe behind walls, he should desist, return,
Leave work half done, so have to do it twice.

BELISARIUS

ACT II

MARCELLUS. That is the Emperor's nature.

UNIGATUS.

Well for us

Had he a different ! I am sick at heart
At the world's treatment of my General.

MARCELLUS. The General himself must be.

UNIGATUS.

Oh, he !

He's prodigal of virtues ; where another
Is loyal, is trusty, he will pile a mountain
And light a blazing beacon of loyalty.
So when this messenger comes to the camp,
And Belisarius, just on his horse,
Ready to follow ; every detail sure,
Of horse, of foot, of commissariat,
Communications (you're no soldier, sir,
And can't know what that means) he took the letter
And read it, and sat still a little while,
His teeth upon his lip, then : " Well," says he,
" It is the Emperor's order. We return."

MARCELLUS. Better perhaps have disobeyed for once,
Torn up the letter, followed Zabergan,
Trusted that his success should win forgiveness.

UNIGATUS. Trusting in us more surely. There ! who knows,
My words will get me into harm.

MARCELLUS.

With me ?

UNIGATUS. I hope not, sir ; but I remember now,
Silence is safest.

MARCELLUS. I'll risk more than you
If you will listen.

UNIGATUS. I will not betray.

MARCELLUS. Well, then, have you considered, there's less sin
To rob a man of one year of his life,
Than twenty, thirty ?

UNIGATUS. What's all this to me ?

MARCELLUS. Someone we know grows very old and frail,
Loses his reason and his faculties,
Retaining still the fullest power to harm
Without the sense to guide the power.

UNIGATUS. Well ?

MARCELLUS. Do we not take a keen-edged sword away
From a little child, lest it should hurt itself,
And all its playmates—though the child protests,
Cries, roars ? May we not do the same
With dotage, second childhood—take the hilt
Lest the edge hurt us and the child itself ?

UNIGATUS. Please speak more plainly.

MARCELLUS. Here's the case for you
The Emperor's in his dotage, and does harm
To you, to me, to all beneath his rule,

BELISARIUS

ACT II

With his oppressive taxes, while his soul
Narrows in meanness every year he lives ;
He is surrounded with vile sycophants,
No honest man can come at him.

UNIGATUS. That's true;
Witness his treatment of my General.

MARCELLUS. If you will help your master to his rights,
Join with us, whose desire is to see
The Emperor dethroned, and justice done
To Belisarius.

UNIGATUS. The Emperor!
He goes for little in my thoughts.

MARCELLUS. But listen !

Do you not think that Belisarius
Would grace a diadem ? What is Justinian
To lord it so : he was of peasant birth,
While Belisarius is princely stock
From the borders of Illyria ; a hero,
And princely in his many victories.
It's a short step to make him Emperor.

UNIGATUS. Is that your plan?

MARCELLUS. What do you say to it?
He's not the first on whom a crown is forced
By his own soldiers.

UNIGATUS. Have you spoken to him?

MARCELLUS. Oh, God forbid such folly! 'Twould look ill

If he conspired against Justinian.

But once Justinian is put away,

He may accept the suffrage of his friends

To make him Emperor.

UNIGATUS. Well, plots and plans

Go ill with soldiers.

MARCELLUS. Will you trust in me?

UNIGATUS. I'll think about the matter; I'd have liked

My General's advice.

MARCELLUS. Why, you are mad;

He would not thank you to be told of the deed,

Ere deed it was.

UNIGATUS. I will keep silent then;

But once you start on matters underground,

It's difficult to know when you'll emerge

Into clear daylight.

Enter SERGIUS.

MARCELLUS. Here's a friend of ours,

Who has your General's welfare much at heart.

SERGIUS. Who's that you speak of?

MARCELLUS.

Belisarius.

BELISARIUS

ACT II

SERGIUS. He'll be here shortly, for the Emperor
Will meet his army in the Augusteum.

UNIGATUS. I must attend him. Lord Marcellus, thanks.
You have not told me what you'd have me do.

MARCELLUS. Nothing at present, and at any time
Nothing against your honour.

UNIGATUS. I believe you;
And I will deeply think about your words.

MARCELLUS. Cogitate well, my friend and more than friend.
[Exit UNIGATUS.]

SERGIUS. Who is this latest fly of yours, O spider?

MARCELLUS. One Unigatus, a good simpleton;
Lieutenant, and devoted follower
Of Belisarius. I've netted him,
Because his influence on the palace guard
Will be most valuable.

SERGIUS. Do you hope
To make him false to Belisarius?

MARCELLUS. Why, I persuaded him, our end and aim
Was to do justice to his master. Faith!
For every kind of bird a different lime.

SERGIUS. With what will you catch Belisarius?

MARCELLUS. With his ambition.

SERGIUS. For so shrewd a man
You're badly out : for he has, up to now,
Refused all honours, save the grudging few
Justinian granted.

MARCELLUS. Well, we must contrive
Something to snare him ; if we ring him round
With endless threads, suborn his servants, friends,
—That Unigatus, and one Julian,
His steward, joined us only recently—
Draw Antonina in ; her snare is gold ;
He'll find himself obliged to stand or fall
With his household. If he proves too honest still
His way must be Justinian's.

SERGIUS. His death ?

MARCELLUS. What else is there when men are dangerous ?
Here comes the Emperor ; how black he looks !

Enter JUSTINIAN in state, in the royal robes and high diadem of a Byzantine Emperor ; he is attended by Slaves, Eunuchs, and richly dressed Officers, among whom are ISAAC, SOLOMON, THEODORE, and DEMETRIUS, completely restored to brazenness, pushing, talking, and gesticulating. Off the stage are heard enthusiastic shouts.

JUSTINIAN. *(stopping the procession by a gesture).* What noise
is that ?

BELISARIUS

ACT II

ISAAC. The guttersnipes and loafers,
And all such riff-raff, shouting out the name
Of Belisarius.

JUSTINIAN. Let it be stopped;
It's most unseemly.

MARCELLUS (*to Sergius*). Who shall chain up tongues?

Enter BELISARIUS in full war-dress; he is followed by JOHN and MARTIAN, UNIGATUS, and his veteran guard. Wherever he passes he is hailed with shouts and acclamations, flowers are thrown before him, and even jewellery, which the women take from their necks or arms. They advance slowly, hampered by the enthusiasm of the crowd.

On the one side of the stage is BELISARIUS, followed by an admiring crowd of men and women. On the other is the EMPEROR, surrounded by his Court, watching the proceedings scornfully.

BELISARIUS. Let me go forward, my good people. Come,
The Emperor awaits me.

JUSTINIAN (*to Isaac*). Call them here.

ISAAC (*advancing*). The Emperor commands, John, Martian,
And Belisarius, that you advance.

UNIGATUS. Ah, is that well? Shall Belisarius
Stand in the third place, even on the tongue?

JUSTINIAN. Our Generals, take our Imperial thanks
From our own mouth.

JOHN (*bowing low*). Whatever we have done
Such thanks outweighs them.

BELISARIUS (*advancing hastily*). Sir, sir, more than thanks
Had been the power to finish my campaign.

JUSTINIAN. Is this the way that you receive our favour?

BELISARIUS. Favour? What favour's here? I must protest
Once more again your lack of confidence,
When I was on the eve of victory
That should have graced you, comes an underling
As full of his importance as a bride,
And takes away my power; yet you swore
I should have full authority to act
As I thought fit.

JUSTINIAN. You are grown insolent
With that brief power, and too well appears
Our wisdom in recalling you.

UNIGATUS (*starting forward*). O God!

BELISARIUS (*silencing UNIGATUS with a gesture*). I speak un-
flattering, that's soldier's talk;
You know my service yours. Then give me leave
To set out hot-foot after Zabergan,
And finish what I have begun.

BELISARIUS

ACT II

JUSTINIAN.

Not so:

We will not risk our army further now.

BELISARIUS. Sir, they are scattered and demoralized
After their late defeat. I'll make them serve,
As an example to the world at large,
The Empire cannot with impunity
Be set at naught.

DEMETRIUS (*leaning familiarly to JUSTINIAN'S ear*).

Your Majesty, take heed;

This fine oration's for the populace,
Hanging upon his words.

BELISARIUS (*turning on him*). Demetrius,
Did I not swear if you were found abroad
Ere my return I'd have you scourged?

JUSTINIAN.

By God!

You shall not scold our servants in our presence.

ISAAC. Where will his insolence presume to next?

BELISARIUS. May all the world speak, yet I hold my tongue?
My wrongs are hot on me! Demetrius
Skulked here in safety while we fought for you,
Scornfully set at naught the authority
With which you vested me; and I return
To see him at your elbow, in your ear
Whispering baseness. Oh, let me depart

And follow Zabergan, sleep in a ditch,
And eat on horseback, feel my manhood though,
This city stinks about me!

(He turns to go. Manifestations of indignation in the crowd. "Belisarius!" is heard, and "Who saved the city?" "Down with Demetrius!" etc.)

JUSTINIAN *(rising)*. Stay, my friend;
You shall not mar the triumph of to-day
With angry words. Come, it is forty years
That you and I have known each other. Now,
When I'd reward you as you have deserved
For this great victory, you turn your back,
Walk away sulking.

BELISARIUS. Will you pardon me?
I have grown peevish; sputter grievances;
It is a slave's trick. 'Tis your will alone
That makes in your dominions peace or war,
But yet I would advise you earnestly
To let me follow, with all haste I can,
Zabergan northwards.

JUSTINIAN. It's impossible.

BELISARIUS. No, I can overtake him.

JUSTINIAN. No, I say.
We've sent ambassadors to treat with him.

BELISARIUS

ACT II

BELISARIUS. To treat with him, my lord?

IUSTINIAN. Those were our words.

We would not waste our faithful soldiers' blood
More than must needs be.

BELISARIUS. Oh, behind my back
Ambassadors were sent? An old trick, that
You've made me learn before.

DEMETRIUS. Your Majesty,
What clemency was here !—you would not waste
Your servant's blood.

ISAAC. It was a Christian thought.

BELISARIUS. His servant's blood? He'll waste his servants' hearts;
Hearts go for nothing.

JUSTINIAN (*rising and advancing*). Belisarius,
John, Martian, we do embrace you all,
And thank you from the bottom of our heart
For these most notable achievements. John,
Here we create you Nobilissimus,
Count of our stables.

JOHN (*with a deep obeisance*). Oh, munificence!

JUSTINIAN. Martian, we create Clarrisimus,
With fifteen thousand deniers as reward
For holding safe our city in such times.

MARTIAN. Mighty Augustus. (*An obeisance.*)

JUSTINIAN.

Belisarius!

(*BELISARIUS advances.*)

UNIGATUS. Ah, now indeed, he will decree a triumph,
Or recreate the consulship.

JUSTINIAN.

For you,

Take these most hearty thanks you have well earned
By recent actions, which have moved us also
To wipe out from our mind past grievances,
That have been named against you. Come, my lords,
Demetrius, Isaac, Martian, we go
To St. Sophia to give thanks to Him
Who only is our Saviour.

(*BELISARIUS remains silent and motionless.*)

THEODORE.

Come, my lord,

Where's your obeisance to the Emperor?

BELISARIUS (*pushing him aside and advancing to JUSTINIAN*).

Sir, you are Emperor ; neither here nor there
Whom you reward, nor how ; I do not serve
For titles nor for praises, but for duty,
And my own spirit and my country's need.
Therefore, although you give a sounding name
To this one or to that one, while to me
A cold word and averted eye—though many

Might hold my services not less than theirs
 Who have contrived to please you—what of that ?
 There is my duty. I've no right to ask
 More than you choose to give ; but now I pray you
 (Not for my own good, but that you appear
 As just and generous as an Emperor should)
 To reward your soldiers.

JUSTINIAN.

Sir !

BELISARIUS.

My ancient guard

Have well deserved your generosity,
 And after fifteen years of rusty peace,
 Have matched their ancient valour—more, surpassed it !

JUSTINIAN. Enough of this ; the time is unpropitious
 For this discussion ; we're for church.

BELISARIUS.

My lord,

That's a good deed, but it will keep awhile
 Without deterioration ; but ignore
 Your soldiers' services to-day, and time
 Shall never find you in the calendar
 An hour that may requite them for this loss.

JUSTINIAN. Is that a threat ?

BELISARIUS.

I threaten ? Do I speak

For my own person ? But I beg for them.
 Let not the poverty of their old age
 Accuse their Sovereign.

THEODORE. It's insufferable!
A subject so to stand before his lord,
And scold him brazenly.

BELISARIUS. Your Majesty ;
For your own honour do I counsel you.

JUSTINIAN. We have appointed our own counsellors.
You know a soldier's duty is to act
Upon his orders, not to question them.

DEMETRIUS. The man's become inflated with himself
Since he won a skirmish out at Chettos way.

JUSTINIAN. Dismiss the troops.

BELISARIUS. Sir, they have served you well——

JUSTINIAN. Why, Belisarius, you do presume
Upon our favour. But be silent now ;
I'll hear no more of this. Dismiss the troops.
To St. Sophia ; come.

(The veteran guard are dismissed, and march away sullenly. The crowd is dispersed after lingering round BELISARIUS, who remains motionless and makes no sign. The Imperial retinue passes out last, ignoring BELISARIUS, who remains standing in the same place. As MARCELLUS passes UNIGATUS, the latter stops him.)

UNIGATUS. Count on me now.

BELISARIUS

ACT II

MARCELLUS. I knew how it would be.

[*Exit.*

(BELISARIUS *and* UNIGATUS *left alone.* BELISARIUS
perceives him.)

BELISARIUS. Ah, you are there. I thought I was alone.
Well, let's go home.

UNIGATUS. My lord!—The devil take him
And rot him root and branch. To treat you so!
Would the barbarians had sacked the city,
And hanged Justinian from the golden cross
Of St. Sophia——

BELISARIUS. Stop!

UNIGATUS. To serve you so!
Why, I could weep; I am a cursed old fool;
But all my blood ran backwards when I heard him:
“You did presume”—presumed to save his skin,
And his damned eunuchs. Let's be done with him;
He knows not bread, then let him have a stone.
They may dethrone him, kill him, what they will—
I'm one with them.

BELISARIUS. Be silent, Unigatus!

UNIGATUS. Why, I must speak or suffocate. Look now,
We'll be revenged upon them. Did you see
The grinning fools beside him when he scorned you—
Demetrius, Isaac, Theodore: the swine!

And the pinched lips that let out spiteful words
Like vermin from a cellar? Will you stand,
And let them ape at you?

BELISARIUS.

It seems I must.

UNIGATUS. You shall not, by your manhood. Listen now!
The populace so idolize your name
They'd tip this peasant Emperor from his throne,
To place you on it.

Enter JULIAN.

JULIAN.

Sir, you are alone ?

BELISARIUS. Save for an old fool, buzzing in my ear.

JULIAN. Why, he is one of us.

BELISARIUS.

Of us, indeed !

You're of the same goose-feather, I must think.

UNIGATUS. Julian, speak to him.

JULIAN.

Sir, I am sent

By a man of reputable authority
Here in Byzantium. He bid me say
That he, like others, much deplores your wrongs.

BELISARIUS. They are my own concern.

JULIAN.

And he would help you

To have them righted.

BELISARIUS

ACT II

UNIGATUS. There's a scheme a-foot—

A plan—

BELISARIUS. I will have nothing of their schemes,
No, nor their plans.

JULIAN. But never Emperor
Was hated as this one in his old age.

BELIALRIUS. What's that to us?

UNIGATUS. May we not profit by it?

BELISARIUS. You may make honour the antithesis
To profit in such case.

JULIAN. You jeer at us.
But, sir, if you'd but listen to the plan
Marcellus told me to unfold to you——

BELISARIUS. Marcellus?

UNIGATUS. He would make you Emperor.

BELISARIUS. You are talking folly ; we have had enough
For one day, so be silent ! Am I a child
That must be good for sweetmeats ? You may say
To this Marcellus, what is done, is done,
And I'd change nothing, so let him change less.
Go, Julian, and say that. [Exit] JULIAN.

UNIGATUS. Ah, my lord !
What has Justinian done to merit this ?

BELISARIUS. Why, you're an old fool, Unigatus! Come,
Let us go home, and hang our armour up,
That fits old men like us. We must go home,
And think us lucky that a job was found
For us, at our age. Well, that work is done,
But as for all this talking—quiet, now.

[*Exit BELISARIUS with UNIGATUS.*]

SCENE 2.—*A room in BELISARIUS's palace. JOANNINA and ANASTASIUS sitting together; an old female slave sitting in a corner preserves the proprieties, though she sews without paying heed to them.*

ANASTASIUS. And so, sweet love, the Emperor calls me up,
Thanks me, embraces me, but must deplore
The hard necessity of these late times,
(And that excessive bribe to Zabergan
Which I, and all the army, hold as madness)
Prevents him from fulfilling his desire
To let me have that promised dower. There,
You are not listening.

JOANNINA. Yes, indeed I am.

ANASTASIUS. Why, you go smiling, in that way of yours,
Like sunlight over water, while I tell you

The Emperor decrees that you shall have
A penniless husband.

JOANNINA.

So I have a husband !

ANASTASIUS. But listen now, I would not have you wed
A beggarly fellow—that indeed I am !—
And fling away your beauty and your name
(Greater than ever now), your youth, your wealth,
And all that lovely essence of your soul,
Which never can be categoried, on me,
The only merit of whose life, I fear,
Is to have served your father.

JOANNINA (*putting her hand before his mouth*). Foolish lips
To be so talking ; yet say anything
And I shall find such pleasure in the sound, .
Although your words should scold me, I should listen
But to the music, as we do with songs.

ANASTASIUS. Whoever would have called this voice of mine,
Grown raucous with much shouting of commands
In battle, music ?

JOANNINA.

You are wise, you men,
In all the many wondrous ways of the world,
But women wise in one thing, which is love ;
From which, as from the magic talisman

Our nurses' stories tell of, we build up
The domed and ramparted great palaces
Of faery cities. You went talking now
Of doweries, and of beggary and wealth,
And I was smiling just to watch your face,
And see the old tricks of the brow and mouth,
Which I have loved so, and so feared to think of
When you were absent.

ANASTASIUS. Feared to think of, love?
I've thought of you each night, and watched the stars
And the twinkling of the fires ; I thought of you
As I got on my horse, that desperate morn
We gave them battle.

JOANNINA.

Then your charger reared,
And you must give your mind and hand to check him,
And keep him to your place, my father's side ;
Then you must watch his footing, then observe
Whether the troops were steady—Where's the time
To think of me ? Do I reproach you, love,
Doing man's work ? But I, who am a woman,
Had I but let my longing and my fears
Crowd on my soul, not pressed them behind bars,
Chained down my thoughts to dull monotony
Through the many heavy hours of every day,
How had I not gone mad ? I should have paced

BELISARIUS

ACT II

Forwards and backwards like those tigresses
That we see caged, what action would that be
For my father's daughter ? This embroidery,
(*Taking up a piece.*)

How many thousand stitches have I made
Since you departed, every one of them
My will said to my hand, "Go steadily !"
But my heart clamoured "What if he be dead ?"

ANASTASIUS. Ah, my beloved !

JOANNINA. Speak no more of this.
I have you safe again ; let's sit together,
And do you talk to me.

ANASTASIUS. What shall I talk of ?

JOANNINA. About the home that we shall have.

ANASTASIUS. Dear heart,
I'll sit here at your feet.

JOANNINA. We will pretend
We have been married—oh, so many years !
You will not then, you know, take up my scarf
To lay against your cheek, but be content
To sit beside me hand in hand, and talk.

ANASTASIUS. About our children—

JOANNINA.

Ah !—

ANASTASIUS.

What we shall do

With this one or with that one. How the girl
Has got your eyes.

JOANNINA.

Shall such things be, indeed ?

ANASTASIUS. How not, when all folk else may have these joys ?

JOANNINA. Is it not wonderful they call these things

The common joys of all mankind ? Dear saints !
Are there such men and women in the world,
Who love, and marry, see grow up to them
The children of their love, yet do not carry
A broad and streaming banner of happiness
That all may see ?

ANASTASIUS.

Why, there are such, no doubt.

JOANNINA. They do not love as we love ; for—come close—

For this is wicked, Anastasius.
I do not think this heaven of which they tell,
Can match this earth of ours.

ANASTASIUS.

Dear saint of earth !

You make your own heaven round you as you go,
Full of sweet flowers, and simple honest joys.
How should you know of dark things ?

BELISARIUS

ACT II

JOANNINA.

Well enough

Could I be bred in such a house as this,
With such a father, being often wronged,
And such a mother—there, I'll say no more,
Even to you, and there is little need,
You knowing too well more than I can say—
But could I, with my roots so struck in evil,
Grow to the calm and pleasantness and light
Which your love promises? I had forgotten
Old scenes, old fears—they close on me again,
For I am doomed to dark and tortuous things
My soul abhors.

ANASTASIUS.

There, I have frightened you
Blunderer that I am.

JOANNINA.

I had forgotten.

Just in the joy to see you safe again,
In what a shadow I live. It is not cruel
Although it has the likeness; yet sometimes
Does God seem inattentive to our prayers.

ANASTASIUS. What are you speaking of; why are you sad?

JOANNINA. Do you think indeed that we shall ever wed?
My mother hates you.

ANASTASIUS.

I've your father's promise.

JOANNINA. In just that thing I wish that it were more.

ANASTASIUS. I throw my arm o'er you : that's strong enough
To hold you from the world.

JOANNINA. Yet, holding me
Still might the lightning strike me.

ANASTASIA. In my arms ?

Enter ANTONINA hurriedly.

ANTONINA. Where is your father ? Is he not returned ?

ANASTASIUS. Not yet, dear lady, but the Emperor
Keeps him, no doubt.

ANTONINA. Keeps him ? in chains, most like.

JOANNINA. What do you mean ?

ANTONINA. Oh, hold your tongue, you fool.
Look at her pale cheeks for a word ! O God !
That I should have a daughter of such kind.
It is your father's mean and beggarly spirit
That you inherit.

ANASTASIUS. Madam !

ANTONINA. As for you,
Why are you here ?

BELISARIUS

ACT II

ANASTASIUS. What! Have I not the right,
As being your daughter's husband?

ANTONINA. Paramour !
If you've escaped our vigilance, perhaps ;
But husband, no !

Enter BELISARIUS.

BELISARIUS. What words are these ?

JOANNINA. Mere words,
 But meaning nothing. Anastasius
 Has vexed my mother.

BELISARIUS (*to ANTONINA*). You shall pardon him,
For he has well-deserved of us, and fought
Like ten men at my side, and, in the charge,
Lent his own arm and shield to cover me.

JOANNINA. Did I not know it?

BELISARIUS. Antonina, come ;
Will you not thank him ?

ANTONINA. Thanks are out of date ;
Or so it seems—or else I must believe
That you alone, out of all mortal men,
Cannot improve occasion.

BELISARIUS.

So ! you mean——

ANTONINA. I've heard the details of that shameful scene ;
John this is kissed on the cheek, and Martian that
Clutched round the neck by the Imperial arms ;
But Belisarius must eat the dirt,
Be laughed at by the very chamberlains,
Deafen the Emperor with hot, stupid words
About more fighting, when his mind is bent
Upon economy, and so get pushed
And hustled from his presence. Ah, the shame !

JOANNINA. The shame is yours to speak such words to him.

BELISARIUS. What, Joannina, have you not yet learnt,
Of all things that we mortals may possess,
The best is silence ?

ANTONINA. We have come so low,
That every pettifogging lawyer's wife,
Or jack-in-office may look scorn of us.
Have you not made enough mistakes before
In dealing with the Emperor, but that age
Cannot have taught you wisdom ?

BELISARIUS.

It must seem not

ANTONINA. Surely there is an evil fate pursues us,
Though where deserved, God knows ! I trusted this

BELISARIUS

ACT II

To reinstate us in the Emperor's graces,
But now he visits us with more dislike
Than ever ; he will never have our house
In the ascendant ; he prevents the marriage
Of Joannina.

JOANNINA. It shall not be so !

BELISARIUS. Forbids her marriage ? What bad news is this ?

ANTONINA. Forbids, no ! but prevents. (*Pointing to ANAS-*
TASIUS) This gentleman
Has not informed you, that the Emperor,
Has beggared him ?

BELISARIUS. What, Anastasius ?

ANATASIUS. The wedding gift my aunt the Empress offered,
Which he anew did promise, is withdrawn.

JOANNINA. And that is all the story, and what's here
To make a trouble of ? I am your heir—
Which makes him shamefaced asking for my hand—
So while there is sufficient, why discuss
Of superfluity ? Who speaks of wealth ?
I have put poor ambitions, to grow old
Along with him, and never hear my name
Muttered with envy when I go to church,

Because my girdle or my necklaces
Are weightier than my neighbours.

ANTONINA. Joannina !

That I should ever hear a child of mine
Stand up and beg a husband in such terms !

JOANNINA. I never have been prouder than this moment
To be a beggar so.

ANASTASIUS. 'Tis a shrewd task
For a poor soldier to request the hand
Of such an heiress, such a lady as this—
For being rich adds nothing to her worth,
Although it multiplies my worthlessness—
Yet, sir, your generous nature will discern
That only in honour, and of deepest love,
I ask to wed her.

BELISARIUS. Look you, Antonina,
They're promised to each other ; I should fail
In honour if I broke their plighted troth.

ANTONINA. Your honour ! ay, your honour ! let it be ;
You'll sacrifice your daughter to this thing
You call your honour ! Shall your daughter beg,
Or in the porches do dishonest trade,
That you may keep your honour ? Oh, take heed ;
You'll marry her to Anastasius,

BELISARIUS

ACT II

Who through some maladroitness somehow comes
Under Justinian's displeasure.

ANASTASIUS.

No !

ANTONINA. I say that it is so. He has withdrawn
A gift the Empress promised, that's enough
To show how far from him promotion lies ;
And when for some slight unimagined fault
You are disgraced—do you forget, indeed,
The monstrous fine that they imposed on you
After your wars in Persia ? In those days
The Empress was our friend, but who shall now
Stand between ourselves and calamity ?
What should our disinherited daughter do,
Her father dispossessed, possessionless
Her husband ?

JOANNINA. Do not listen to her, father ;
She weaves a subtle web of arguments,
Break through it, breathe——

BELISARIUS. My very love for you
Makes me debate, if happiness does lie
The way of your desire.

JOANNINA. No other way ;
Bear that in mind, at least.

ANASTASIUS.

This wedding gift

The Emperor promised, what if it be gone,
And favour with it? I've my hands and brain,
Some skill in soldiering, yourself have said,
And with the spur of such a wife as this
Glory, I think, should not be hard to find.

ANTONINA. And while you're seeking for your glory, pray,
What does my daughter do? Wash out your shirt,
Or, hanging over an old iron pot,
Cook onions for your soldiers?

JOANNINA.

Rather that,

Than this, without him!

BELISARIUS.

That is love, my girl's!

ANTONINA. You'll listen to this milk-and-water talk,
This vapoury, moonshine business? Trust in me,
I have my reasons when I break the match;
Have not my counsels ever been the best,
In peace, or war? In Italy? at Rome?

BELISARIUS. I've trusted in that virile brain of yours,
And it has served me well; but now, I doubt
It is your femininity's at fault.

ANTONINA. Because you let yourself be moved by tears,
And all this womanish armoury; I know,

BELISARIUS

ACT II

Who am a woman. Break this match at once,
And Joannina in a month or so
Will be as gay as ever, grateful too,
Her head full of the bridegroom I shall find.

ANASTASIUS. Speak, Joannina, speak!

JOANNINA. What use in speaking?

The lie should be its own worst enemy.

ANTONINA. Be guided by me; though she may protest
Her life is ruined, she will never wed,
And this, and that, and tears and cries; I know
It is as temporary as a child's
Small violent tempers. Should I not know girls?

BELISARIUS. I think that you should know your daughter's
heart.

ANTONINA. Then let's be done with the matter.

JOANNINA. Father!

BELISARIUS. No!

Unhappily I think this for the best. My lad,
You are a soldier: bear your fate as such;
Go now, and leave us.

ANASTASIUS. Belisarius!

BELISARIUS. I will befriend you if I ever may——

ANASTASIUS. Sir ! sir ! your promised word——

BELISARIUS.

I break it now.

Go, Anastasius !

ANASTASIUS.

I saved your life ;

Must I plead that ?

BELISARIUS.

I am your debtor for it,

However small the debt be. But my age,

The Emperor's disfavour, and somehow

An evil fortune that belongs to both,

Decides me on this course.

ANASTASIUS (*to JOANNINA*). Speak you to him.

JOANNINA. Why burden him with words ? The thing is done,

The evil thing, the wrong of all his life.

God help him ! But for you and me, oh love !

What shall help us ?

ANASTASIUS.

I cannot go from you.

JOANNINA. Yet I must let you, and I swear—Why, now,

I'll not protest, my mother with her craft

Has so discredited what I might say

Ere it was uttered ; this you must believe,

That never, any time, shall body or soul

Depart from loving you.

BELISARIUS

ACT II

ANASTASIUS. Oh, never now
Shall I find purity and peace ; I'm born
Into an evil family and evil time
And reaching for the one good thing I've known
In all my life, somehow I miss it still ;
Doubtless I was not worthy. I will pray
Only that you do keep your honest eyes,
All through your life.

ANTONINA. Come, come, enough of this ;
You see what good you do by lingering.

ANASTASIUS. You wicked woman, you have been the bane
Of all who've known you ; but your other sins
Show generous beside this latest wrong.

ANTONINA. Who'll rake up past sins ? What of that Greek
girl
For whose whims——

BELISARIUS. Hush ! These things you shall not say.

ANASTASIUS. Oh, Joannina, when you women sit,
Lonely together, will your mother tell
Matters discreditable to me——

JOANNINA. There,
Fear nothing, I am deaf to her henceforth.

BELISARIUS. Go, Anastasius.

ANASTASIUS.

Why, as for you,

That you have wronged me, you yourself best know ;
But think that you have murdered, in my heart,
The faith, the loyalty, the admiration,
For the one man who till this day had shown
A generous spirit ; since such things are lost
To none will I give my allegiance now.

(Taking JOANNINA in his arms.)

My Joannina, in the face of the world
I will embrace you.

BELISARIUS *(with his hand on his sword).*Let the maiden go *(JOANNINA gently disengages herself.)*

*[Exit ANASTASIUS. JOANNINA watches until he
disappears, then she goes to the opposite door.]*

ANTONINA. Where are you going ?

JOANNINA. To my room, if anything is mine at all,
My life being yours.

ANTONINA.

Go, then, and dress yourself

To come to church.

JOANNINA.

To church ? You'd have me pray ?

For what ?

BELISARIUS

ACT II

ANTONINA. For a good Christian mind, indeed,
Towards your mother.

BELISARIUS. Leave the girl alone ;
Young hearts can ache, and words are hateful things.

ANTONINA. Come, Joannina ; I have wished you well
And acted for your good ; I am your mother,
'Twas I that gave you life.

JOANNINA. A bitter gift.
I cannot thank you. Have I leave to go ?

BELISARIUS. Nina, Ninetta ; my dear little child,
We have your good at heart, though we may seem
Needlessly cruel ; try, then, to forgive.

JOANNINA. Yes, I will try indeed ; but let me go.

[Exit JOANNINA, BELISARIUS and ANTONINA left alone.]

END OF ACT II.

ACT III.

SCENE.—*A room in the EMPEROR'S Palace, opening on to a courtyard, where a guard may be seen pacing.*

Enter DEMETRIUS and ISAAC, meeting.

ISAAC. Demetrius, have you heard of this ?

DEMETRIUS.

Of what ?

ISAAC. To-day's conspiracy ?

DEMETRIUS.

No, tell me, pray,

My good newsvendor.

ISAAC.

Well, the senators

Marcellus, Sergius, a crowd of others,

Both great and small, have had a plot it seems

To kill the Emperor.

DEMETRIUS.

What news indeed.

Old Sergius, where did he find the pluck ?

ISAAC. God knows ! In the extremity of fear

A coward will find courage. Sergius,

When he was apprehended, struck his dagger

Into his own heart.

BELISARIUS

ACT III

DEMETRIUS.

Who discovered them ?

ISAAC. One of the number, either out of fear,
Or jealousy, or hope of a reward,
Betrayed them; who it was I do not know,
But the affair has been most widely spread
Throughout Byzantium, will compromise
From slaves to senators.

DEMETRIUS.

Well, this is news!

Which of our friends have tripped into this snare ?

ISAAC. All the participators are not known,
This moment were the actors of it found ;
All ready were they, daggers in their belts,
The usual guard supplanted at the doors
By their black slaves ; it was a pretty trick.

DEMETRIUS. The Emperor's in a swoon of rage and fear
I must suppose?

ISAAC. He has a sort of courage
On these occasions, and is calm enough.

DEMETRIUS. Think you that he will play that game again
Of forgetting and forgiving, that he did
In Arsaces' and Artaban's affair ?

ISAAC. Not this time; they have marched the wretches off

BELISARIUS

ACT III

ISAAC. Where are you off to, sir?

ANASTASIUS. Upon this filthy business of the plot.

My stomach's turned; I have been hearing groans
And watching men in agony. Good-bye,
I have a pressing business. Let me warn you:
Wrong Nature, and most ugly she appears.

[*Exit* ANASTASIUS.]

ISAAC. He's high in favour with Justinian still.

DEMETRIUS. Oh, he'll do everything to help a nephew
Of Theodora's, except part from gold,
And that's the reason Belisarius
Broke off the match.

ISAAC. It would have helped him now
To have had this son-in-law. If Julian
Or that old grizzled fellow with one hand,
What's his name?—Unigatus—don't stand firm
Under the torture—

DEMETRIUS. What! you think at last
That Belisarius has had his fill
Of kicks, and joined this party?

ISAAC. That's not sure,
But still the Emperor will be content
To hear some ill of him; he's too much praised

By all the populace, since his affair
At Chetos, and lampoons and songs are made
Against the Emperor's treatment of him since.

DEMETRIUS. I hate him, with his flinging in our face
This his obedience and his loyalty!

ISAAC. You've an old grudge against him.

DEMETRIUS. So have you.

ISAAC. If word of mine can sway the Emperor
In this affair, it shall be said.

DEMETRIUS. Agreed.

*Enter JUSTINIAN with his servants, THEODORE and the Prefect
HYPATIUS.*

JUSTINIAN. So Sergius is dead?

HYPATIUS. He died at once,
Ere we could lift him from the ground.

JUSTINIAN. * The worse.
But you've Marcellus safe?

HYPATIUS. Shall he be fetched?
Here is his deposition, with the names
Of his accomplices,

BELISARIUS

ACT III

JUSTINIAN.

Then give it me.

(*Reading*) Anthony, Photius, and Alexander—
Oh, God, how many names! Could they not wait
Until the crown should tumble off my head,
Bowed with its bitter weight of eighty years,
But they must take God's work into their hands
To snap the threadbare ribbon of my life?
(*Reading*) Julian, Marcus, Unigatus—ah!
Is Unigatus not the friend?—

HYPATIUS.

My lord,

Of Belisarius.

JUSTINIAN.

I feared as much :

That his ambition overruled his duty.
Did not Marcellus name him?

HYPATIUS.

No, my lord.

But Julian, his chamberlain, deposed,
Under the torture, to have heard such words
As witness to his infidelity.

JUSTINIAN. Where is this Julian? Let him be brought,
And Unigatus too.

HYPATIUS.

They'd not arrived

At getting any evidence from him,
But doubtless now he is less stubborn, sire.

JUSTINIAN. His evidence we must have. See to it.

[*Exit HYPATIUS.*]

This time, indeed, the law must take its course,
Making of these conspirators a show
To awe the rest of men. Our clemency
To Arsaces bred but contempt of us,
Although we trusted mercy to have steered
This poor voyage-weary vessel of our body
Into its harbour without mutiny.

*Re-enter HYPATIUS with MARCELLUS, JULIAN, and UNIGATUS,
guarded.*

MARCELLUS (*kneeling*). Mercy, oh, gracious Majesty!

JUSTINIAN.

For what?

MARCELLUS. For the bare conception of a grievous sin,
Which yet was not performed.

DEMETRIUS (*aside*).

Small thanks to him!

JUSTINIAN. Marcellus, say; what mercy had you shown
On my grey hairs, when, all my guards withdrawn,
And I unarmed and helpless, your quick dagger
Had struck me, here? There's none so glib for mercy
As he who never gave it. I've loved mercy
Up to the limit of blame-worthiness,
But bred no honest children out of it,
But bastards, strife, and treason.

BELISARIUS

ACT III

MARCELLUS.

Yet, my lord,

Remember to my favour this one thing,
That I repented instantly, and proved,
By my compliance to your questioners,
How I abhorred the sharers of my crime,
Abhorring so the crime.

DEMETRIUS (*aside to ISAAC*). A new light, that,
On an old meanness, to betray your friends !

JUSTINIAN. I have the list of those you named, Marcellus.
Be careful of your witness.

MARCELLUS.

Prove me, sire !

JUSTINIAN. Most stringently I'll prove you. Let these men,
Named by Marcellus, be arrested now ;
But as for these two wretches (*pointing to JULIAN and*
UNIGATUS) who were found
Here in the palace, they have mentioned one
By you omitted from the damned black list.

MARCELLUS. His name, sire.

JUSTINIAN.

Belisarius.

MARCELLUS.

My lord,

I feared to name one high in your esteem.

JUSTINIAN. You have earned torture to suppress a name

However near and dear. Hypatius,
What is the deposition of these men
Against their master ?

HYPATIUS (*to UNIGATUS*). Speak out, fellow, now.

UNIGATUS. Why should I speak ? I have not said a word
Against my General.

HYPATIUS. Will you add lies
To all the rest ? Sire, it is written down
That, having fainted twice upon the rack
And been revived, this Unigatus owned
To hearing Belisarius pronounce
Indubitable treason.

UNIGATUS. It's a lie.
My tongue could never play that filthy trick
Upon my heart, for in no circumstance
Has thought been harboured by my General
Against your Majesty.

JUSTINIAN. Take him away.
These contradictions must be straightened out,
And which is lie, which truth, the rack shall tell.

UNIGATUS. Ah, no, your Majesty.

JUSTINIAN. Take him away.

UNIGATUS. What would you have me say ?

BELISARIUS

ACT III

JUSTINIAN.

The truth.

UNIGATUS.

The truth?

Oh, God ! my lord, in such a mist of pain
As I am, truth grows blurred. What would you have ?
Perhaps the General may have said to me
You used him ill ; no more, I swear, no more ;
And most men for such treatment would have sworn
Heaven and hell atop of you. He said
That he would serve you——

JUSTINIAN.

He is rambling now ;

Take him away and test him.

[UNIGATUS *is taken out.*

As for you,

Julian is your name ? Will you attest
Your deposition ?

JULIAN.

I do swear to it.

HYPATIUS (*reading*). He says : He overheard the General
Saying in converse—hum ! this reads too vague—
Did not the General say at any time
That he had joined a plot to kill our lord ?

JULIAN. No, sir, he did not.

HYPATIUS.

Are you sure of that,
Or must we question you again as well ?

JULIAN. No, no ; my lord, he would not speak to me,
I was his steward only. Unigatus
Was his familiar, in his confidence ;
He best of all would know the General's heart.

JUSTINIAN. We must have Unigatus' testimony.

Enter BELISARIUS, sword in hand.

BELISARIUS. I have heard certain rumours in the streets,
My lord, about a plot against your life,
So hurried here to offer you my sword,
If this be true, as years ago I came
To quell the factions of the Blues and Greens
That rose against you. Have you need of me
For a rebellious city ?

JUSTINIAN. Hypocrite !
Cover your face from me, O hypocrite !
Judas, will you betray me with a kiss ?

BELISARIUS. What are you saying ?

JUSTINIAN. Oh, that you should come,
With such a show of plausibility,
To offer me your services, whose sword,
Whose vile dishonoured sword, would soon have turned
Against my body.

BELISARIUS

ACT III

BELISARIUS. What's this foolery?
How should I ever turn my sword against you,
Who've blunted it on your behalf too much?

JUSTINIAN. You stand accused by those who know you well
And cannot beat the truth down brazenly.

BELISARIUS. This is a lie too great for common sense.
Where are these same accusers? Little men,
My discipline has irked perhaps in war,
Or my intolerance of littleness
Fretted in peace. You will not let such pigmies
Weigh with my word, so backed by all my life
Of rectitude and loyalty?

UNIGATUS *is brought in, surrounded by soldiers, and in
charge of* HYPATIUS.

HYPATIUS. Here, my lord,
Is one who does accuse him; he deposes
More clearly now against the General.

BELISARIUS. Show me this same accuser.

HYPATIUS. This is he!
*(The soldiers surrounding UNIGATUS fall back, and he
is shown supported between two soldiers.)*

BELISARIUS. Unigatus!

UNIGATUS. Belisarius!
What have I done?

BELISARIUS.

Why, that seems clear enough.

UNIGATUS (*to the soldiers*). Let go of me, you fellows! let me go!

I cannot walk, but I'll essay to crawl
With my vile body, like a trodden worm,
To kiss my General's feet and ask his pardon.

BELISARIUS. Pardon! I'll learn to give that presently.
I see what they've been after, you poor wretch,
By that maimed body. Well, it is a trick,
Worthy the utter vileness of this age,
To make my friend accuse me.

UNIGATUS. Oh, your friend!
O God! what word was that? I've done this thing,
Which all the cycles of the blessed heavens
Shall never teach me to put out of mind.

JUSTINIAN. Read me this soldier's deposition.

HYPATIUS. Sire;

On several occasions, he declares,
That when he talked with Belisarius
About our daily happenings, he affirmed
The reins of government had grown so slack
In the Imperial hands; it was a wonder
That no ambitious younger man arose
To snatch them from him.

BELISARIUS

ACT III

JUSTINIAN.

Belisarius!

Let your own thought accuse you.

HYPATIUS.

Furthermore,

On the occasion, lord, of his return
From fighting Zabergan ; when you restrained
His blood-thirsty ambition, that had risked
Your soldiers against those barbarians
For his own selfish aims, that he cried out
Upon a slavish age, anxious to have
Peace of their pockets, rather than their swords !
That he would never brook it in your place.

JUSTINIAN. This lets too clear a light on his procedure ;
His currying favour with the populace ;
His ostentatious generosity
To those who served at Chettos under him ;
This letting of his servants weave a plot
To murder me, which he might profit by,
And yet keep blameless in the public sight.

HYPATIUS. This paper adds as further testimony
That he broke off his daughter's promised match
With Anastasius, for what other cause
Than being too poor a husband, and too mean,
As nephew of deposed Justinian,
For the future Emperor's daughter.

ISAAC.

Damnable !

HYPATIUS. In fact, my lord, in half a hundred way,
Small though each single incident might be,
Yet as the finest threads shall twist a strand
To haul a tree down, so these fine-spun facts
Shall weave a rope to drag a soul to hell.
He stands convicted.

JUSTINIAN. That I live to see
The man whose honesty has been a word
Throughout Byzantium, with such a vile craft
Draw every public and every private matter
To serve his end.

DEMETRIUS (*aside to ISAAC*). I think our friend is caught.

ISAAC (*aside to DEMETRIUS*). That's a sure thing.

BELISARIUS. Speak once more, Unigatus :
Is this your testimony ?

UNIGATUS. Oh, my lord !
There's so much of my words, and so much false
Inextricably woven ; which is which
Not God can now determine.

BELISARIUS. It appears
That you repeated—there, I blame you not,
But wonder, rather—all the private words
I've held with you, and none but you, on earth,

BELISARIUS

ACT III

When some injustice or stupidity
Fretted a heart that age has not made tame,
And I spoke out ; I've an impatient tongue,
Though none but you has known it. Well, it seems
My enemies chose well when they chose you
To be my ruin.

UNIGATUS.

Every word of yours

Sears me like iron—I speak what I know,
Who've felt it recently. Could you believe
I never harboured in my heart a thought
Except toward your good ! This gentleman,
Marcellus, promised if I helped his plan
You should be righted, who had been so wronged
For being a better soldier, greater man
Than those who used you. I shall harm you now,
Who've harmed enough for one day. When they
stretched me
Out on their rack, I thought : “ Now death shall come,
But I not speak.” Death does not come, you know ;
Although I thought it had when first I swooned,
But woke again ; after the second time
I could not think quite clearly ; then they came
(For they are very cunning) asking me :
“ Did you not think that you had cause enough
To hate the Emperor ? ” “ Had you never said

BELISARIUS

ACT I

But nothing broken can be whole again,
Though we may patch it.

Enter JOANNINA hurriedly, followed by ANASTASIUS.

JOANNINA. Is my father here ?

JUSTINIAN. Who is this woman rushing to our presence ?
How did she pass the guard ?

ANASTASIUS. I brought her, sire.

JUSTINIAN. You did inopportunately ; take her back.
If she has some small grievance to set right,
There are the public times to claim my ear.
Take her away at once.

JOANNINA (*kneeling and taking his mantle*). Your Majesty,
I am a suppliant, hold your mantle's hem
With my mortal fingers, as our souls do hang
For our salvation on the cross of Christ.
It is the noblest memory of your reign
That you have never played the Unjust Judge
Towards a woman or poor citizen.

JUSTINIAN. What do you want ?

JOANNINA. My father !

JUSTINIAN. Who is he ?

JOANNINA. I am the daughter of Belisarius.

JUSTINIAN. Let go my mantle ! Up from your knees !
Is this another trick of that old fox
To move me with a woman's tears ?

BELISARIUS. Go home,
Unless you will add shame to my disgrace.
Go home !

JOANNINA. I disobey you.
(To JUSTINIAN) Oh, my lord !
He is accused of treason——

HYPATIUS. Rightly too.

JOANNINA. Rightly ? Oh, never ! shall one day belie
The fixed direction of his sixty years ?
Others, my lord, have served you in their time,
Well, too ; but who have loved you ? I remember,
Since memory first was in my infant mind,
The loyalty and devotion that I felt
Hearing your name pronounced, I knew not why,
But it grew on my senses as the faint
Gold halo that marked out a saint or angel
In our mosaics ; it was ever spoken
By those who bred me with such reverence,
Ay, and such love ; then later, as I grew,

Devotion grew with knowledge. Then I learned
 How you had planned a bold and mighty scheme
 To bring once more within the Roman rule
 The old possessions; how you held in sway
 A quarter of the world; but here my father
 Would stop to praise, as well a soldier might,
 The cold simplicity of private life
 That made a splendid contrast to the blaze
 Surrounding you, yet most he loved to speak
 About your highest glory—so he termed it—
 The great and noble laws that you had framed,
 To hold the scales of justice evenly
 Between the rich and poor. Shall you conceive
 That such a man, who cherished in his heart
 All loyalty, all affection, yesterday,
 To-day should make a plot to murder you?

ISAAC. The lady is a powerful advocate.

DEMETRIUS. She has her mother's histrionic gifts.

JUSTINIAN. Yet she has spoken well.

DEMETRIUS. Too well, my lord;
 How did she know these matters that befell
 An hour ago, unless a hint sufficed
 Her guilty knowledge? Is it common talk,
 Among the maidens of Byzantium,

That Belisarius has been arraigned
For treason ?

ISAAC. Ay, she rather damns his cause.

JUSTINIAN (*to* JOANNINA). How did you know these things ?

JOANNINA. My lord——

JUSTINIAN. Speak out
How did you know of this ?

ISAAC. She cannot say.

JOANNINA. May I speak out now, Anastasius,
Although I harm you ?

ANASTASIUS. Speak then, if you must.

JOANNINA. That must I, though I would not speak of love,
Now, or before these men ; but, sire, you know
That Anastasius was my betrothed,
And the match broken through no will of his,
Nor mine, indeed ; so when he heard to-day
My father was accused of treachery
He came to me, dishonoured as I am,
Proposing marriage ; we should leave old wrongs,
And in a new land, among new, sweet faces,
Of unremembering children, learn again
How to be happy.

JUSTINIAN. Anastasius,
So you reward our trust ?

BELISARIUS

ACT III

ANASTASIUS.

What harm, my lord?

It was the lady that I wished to wed,
Neither her father nor her property.

BELISARIUS. Home with her; you did wrong to bring her here!

ANASTASIUS. It was her will compelled me like a flood,
Or like a rapid flame, or shooting star,
Or all things quick and bright.

JUSTINIAN (*to JOANNINA*).
Coming to me?

What did you hope for,

JOANNINA. That you would stay your hand
Against my father till your equal mind
Should, from the mass of hate and prejudice,
Have sifted out the truth.

JUSTINIAN.

That will I do.

JOANNINA. Then shall you know my father blameless, sire.

JUSTINIAN. Oh, foolish heart! So much we have believed
Until this hour; might we think so still!
But there are proofs more strong than our desires.
Those men confessed his treason.

(*Pointing to UNIGATUS and JULIAN.*)

IOANNINA.

Unigatus !

Against my father? There is some mistake :

I looked to find an enemy, but here—
No, you are tricked. Oh, surely tricked somewhere !
For could my father have planned treason, sire
(Which is not in the region of events
Made possible on earth), yet Unigatus
Would never have confessed it.

DEMETRIUS.

Yet he has.

JOANNINA. Have patience for a moment. I must dream
That known familiar things should take strange shapes,
As in a nightmare, and turn horrible.
Honest is honest. Father !

BELISARIUS.

Ask not me.

UNIGATUS. No, ask not him, who would not foul his mouth
To speak my accusation ; but ask me.
Then ; it is true ; then ; I have been a spy
Upon your secret hearts ; have talked with you,
Walked in your garden in the evening cool
To watch the stars come out ; have eaten with you,
And know your favourite dishes ; watched you grow
From when you were no higher than my knee,
And I must reach down fruit from off the walls.
Do you remember all these things ?

JOANNINA.

I do.

BELISARIUS

ACT III

HYPATIUS (*to* JUSTINIAN). Sire, shall I stop this fellow?

JUSTINIAN.

No, let be;

We yet may trip him in familiar speech,
More than the question could, to help our case.

UNIGATUS (*to* JOANNINA). You look at me from under your smooth brows.

Do you remember to have seen us walk,
Your father with his arm about my neck,
Or leaning on my shoulder, stopping now,
To draw in the dust the plan of such a field
That we have fought together: "So it went,
Here lay the river, there the forest stood;
Our left wing had been better placed this way,"
And all the time I, serpent as I am,
Storing up words and gestures that might be
Turned to my vile account.

JOANNINA.

I pity you——

UNIGATUS. Ah, lady!

JOANNINA.

As one pities pariah dogs,
Idiots in the sun, and hooded lepers,
And all things hateful and outcast from the world.

BELISARIUS. Young blood, young blood, how harshly you can judge!

Meeting a good man slipped into a slough
You should not scorn him for his muddy plight.

UNIGATUS. There, her eyes burn me ! There, what more you
say

Can matter little ; I got up this morning
An honest man—how much is it past noon ?
“ Honest is honest,” says she ; how many hours
To breed dishonesty from out my mouth,
Or in my damned body germinate ?
I am become a home of beastliness,
Blind things that creep, and lice and little snakes
Are my inhabitants, where once there dwelt
Honour and courage and a man’s just pride.

JUSTINIAN. Take him away. He raves !

UNIGATUS. The little snake
Have fiery tongues, but I have earned them well.
Sting ! sting ! you serpents ; it may dull the edge
Of that sharp look he gave me when we met,
Accuser and accused——

HYPATIUS. Take him away.

JUSTINIAN. I think he is possessed.

UNIGATUS. Just one thing more ;
That ends my day.

BELISARIUS

ACT III

(UNIGATUS *seizes the dagger of the Soldier next to him and strikes it to his heart.*)

JUSTINIAN. What have you let him do?

BELISARIUS. Why, Unigatus!

UNIGATUS. I have made an end
Of one who could betray his friend and master—
I owed you that. (*He dies.*)

BELISARIUS. I think it was well done.

JUSTINIAN. Lift him up, one of you; stanch his wound, I say,
He must not die. We need his witness yet.

BELISARIUS. You're quit of him, my lord, and he of you.

JUSTINIAN. What! is the fellow dead? Was ever man
Worse served than I? (*To the Soldiers.*) You fools
and blunderers,
Can you not even guard a one-armed man
From seizing of your daggers? You deserve
The fate that he's escaped.

ISAAC (*in his ear*). No matter, sire,
It is vexatious that the man is dead,
But I will bolster out these facts enough
To damn our friend there.

JUSTINIAN. Take the body out.

Let Belisarius be now removed,
Pending his trial for treason.

JOANNINA. Oh, my lord !

JUSTINIAN. Be silent, woman, and go home again ;
I will not hear a word.

ANASTASIUS. I'll take you home.

JUSTINIAN. By God, you shall not, Anastasius !
It is the father that you shall escort,
And not the daughter.

DEMETRIUS (*taking her hand*). Let me play the gallant
To lead the lady home. Come on, my dear.

BELISARIUS. Demetrius ! let go my daughter's hand.
Go, Joannina. You had added something,
If an addition had been possible,
To this day's burden. Go, then.

JOANNINA. I will go.

[*Exit* JOANNINA.]

JUSTINIAN. Take his sword from him.

BELISARIUS. Sire ?

ANASTASIUS (*advancing*). That sword of yours.

BELISARIUS (*drawing it*). Here is my sword. I drew it from
its sheath

The first time on Justinian's behalf,
Ere I was twenty; and at Chettos last,
Hardly a month ago. This sword of mine
Had carved me out a kingdom at my will,
In Africa: again in Italy,
It did not so. This sword of mine had sold
To Gaul or Persia for a princely sum;
It was not sold. It is the Emperor's.
Here is the use that he will put it to.

*(He breaks it and throws it before JUSTINIAN. He
pushes it with his foot.)*

So let it be! There's two old friends gone now.
Well, where's this prison?

ANASTASIUS.

You must come with me.

END OF ACT III.

ACT IV.

SCENE I.—*A Hall of Justice; at the back a curtained alcove concealing JUSTINIAN; in the centre POMPEIUS is seated, facing him are BELISARIUS on the left and ISAAC on the right. JUSTUS is beside BELISARIUS as his counsel; JULIAN, THEODORE, and DEMETRIUS act as witnesses; there are two Scribes taking notes. As the scene opens ISAAC is speaking.*

ISAAC. These are the causes which impelled me, sir,
To bring an accusation into court
Against this man, called Belisarius,
Also at one time General of the East,
And Consul for his year; those favours heaped
The Emperor on his unworthy head
That he stood highest of all citizens,
Until he did aspire above the level
Of citizenship to be Emperor.

BELISARIUS. Protest against that, Justus.

JUSTUS (*producing a paper*). I protest.

The accusation says no word at all

BELISARIUS

ACT IV

About the aspirations of my client
Toward the purple, only that he planned
Against the Emperor's life.

ISAAC. "Only," my lord,
"Against the Emperor's life." I beg you mark
This "only." Does it not display the man
In all his cynical indifference
Towards his highest duty?

JUSTUS. It's enough
If I disprove the charge that's written here,
Then must they bring an action, if they will,
That he conspired to be Emperor.

ISAAC. The one implies the other.

DEMETRIUS. And, besides,
It is well known how he suborns the city
From their allegiance. One is sick, perhaps;
So off to Belisarius. "What, friend,
You were a soldier? Shame that poverty
Should be the lot of such a gallant fellow
Who served the Emperor so. Had you served me!—
Well, well, here's money for you." Or again
When his Imperial Majesty refused
A bonus to the soldiers, knowing well
His anxious people could afford too ill

His generosity, what does this man,
But ostentatiously to give them pay
Out of his pocket?

BELISARIUS. Will they even make
A lever of my private charities,
To hoist me from my seat?

JUSTUS. I beg, my lord,
You'll enforce silence on this gentleman;
He is entirely irrelevant
To what we have in hand.

POMPEIUS. Be silent, there.
Isaac, supporting this grave charge of yours
You can bring witnesses?

ISAAC. Indeed, I can.
I call you, Theodore.

BELISARIUS. But I protest.
It is an ordinance of Roman law,
That law which is a beacon to the world,
That no man may be witness in a case
Against his private enemy.

ISAAC. Maybe;
But he accused of treason shares no way

BELISARIUS

ACT IV

ISAAC.

Yes, indeed it is.

BELISARIUS. What ! that a servant, one whose testimony
Was given under torture, should be called
Against his master. Is that Roman law ?

POMPEIUS. It is allowed in trials for treason, sir.

BELISARIUS. These lawyers beat me. Come then, Julian ;
You served me faithfully for many years,
And met with confidence enough. But speak.

ISAAC. He will intimidate the man with threats,
And make him witness falsely.

BELISARIUS.

I'll not speak.

JULIAN. I pray you, put me where I cannot see him,
And I'll tell all.

POMPEIUS. Why, let the fool stand there.
Do you corroborate most faithfully
Your written evidence ?

JULIAN.

I do, my lord.

POMPEIUS. That you have heard, at many different times,
Your lord undoubtedly expounding treason
Against the Emperor ?

JULIAN.

I have, my lord.

When he besieged Ravenna, years ago,
And while the operations were in force,
The Emperor then treating with the Goths,
The General swore he would not make an end,
Though half a million treaties should be signed,
Until the city fell.

POMPEIUS.

A serious charge.

BELISARIUS (*rising*). God's blood and body! This charge shall not pass.

I was campaigning—as the custom was—
With too few men, and those ill-disciplined,
Ill-armed, half-starved, by the venality
Of our court officers, and I received
Orders to take Ravenna, which was called
Impregnable. While I was taking it
Ambassadors were sent—the old stale game—
To make a treaty with the Goths. Recall,
If you will speak of this past history,
Uraias and his squadron begged of me
To be their leader : “ Did I not prefer
The situation of a sovereign
To that of slave ? ” Well, I preferred the slave,
And had a slave’s reward.

POMPEIUS.

You wrong yourself

By this unseemly violence in the court.

BELISARIUS

ACT IV

BELISARIUS (*re-seating himself*). I will have patience. At my age, God knows,
And with my various opportunities,
I should have learnt it.

POMPEIUS (*to JULIAN*). Have you more to say?

JULIAN. Why, sir, at Naples, in the same campaign,
When we had found a way into the city
By some old aqueduct, the General
Sends for their leader, Stephen, all but tells
That he had found an entry, warning him
The city must infallibly be taken.
And only to their folly was it due,
Not to our General's wisdom, it was won.

BELISARIUS. May I not speak?

POMPEIUS. If it is relevant.

BELISARIUS. Relevant, sir? To what? It's relevant
Just to my honour. Find you that enough?
This tale of Naples, that I wished to spare
A general massacre—how should you know,
You silken stay-at-homes, who hire men
To do your killing, how like hell itself
A sacked town shows? You might have learned, perhaps,
Recently, here; you would not then desire

Blue heaven should witness things that I have seen.
Is clemency a treason? Yet, pass that;
For there's a saying of great Julius
That he's a fool, who, with his enemy
At bay, will drive him to despair. He knew
How many squadrons had been lost that way.
Is strategy a treason? So it seems.

POMPEIUS. The Emperor will willingly forget
These thirty-year-old scandals, but we fear
There are more serious facts of recent date.

JULIAN. I know no more than what is written, sir,
In my confession.

POMPEIUS. That your master here
Was long and intimately used to talk
With Unigatus, who, before he died,
Owned that he had the definite intent
To make the General Emperor?

JULIAN. That is all.

DEMETRIUS (*to ISAAC*). These accusations are too vapoury.
It was a pity Unigatus died;
He had been got to speak, and we'd have plucked
This grey old gamecock.

ISAAC (*to DEMETRIUS*). Oh, the evidence

BELISARIUS

ACT IV

Matters no whit ! Pompeius knows too well
What's wanted of him ; somebody sits there,
Behind the curtain too, and sees it done.

(He points to the curtained alcove.)

DEMETRIUS *(to ISAAC)*. It would look better in the public eye
To have more evidence.

ISAAC *(to DEMETRIUS)*. This fellow shirks ;
He is white-livered.

DEMETRIUS *(to ISAAC)*. Had you tutored him ?

ISAAC *(to DEMETRIUS)*. He was to say the General sounded him
And others in his presence, of the favour
A soldier Emperor might have.

DEMETRIUS *(to ISAAC)*. Oh, good faith,
I'll rise and swear to that ; the trial's too long.
Besides, our lord behind the curtain there
May bear in mind my willing offices.

POMPEIUS. Dismiss the witness.

ISAAC. Lord Demetrius
Will give his evidence.

DEMETRIUS *(rising)*. Forgive me, sir,
That I've withheld my evidence so long,
Such grievous matter touching on the State

And on the Emperor ; I held my tongue
Out of respect for an old veteran,
And for an ancient friendship. Speak I must,
Out of my duty. Belisarius
Accosted me one day, and questioned me,
At first with much discretion, afterwards
With cynical exposure, how to count
On my support, if he, well managing
The populace and certain factious spirits,
Should find himself proclaimed as Emperor.

BELISARIUS (*rising*). Surely I have been bitten by a wolf
To hear these things propounded openly
Here, in a court of justice? Is it sense,
That here is my notorious enemy,
Who's taken words from me no living man
Should suffer from another, and I go
(Yes, in my dotage though I be) to him
With treasonable counsels?

DEMETRIUS. I will swear
That this is so.

BELISARIUS. What! Have you never heard
That hell gapes for false witnesses?

DEMETRIUS. I swear
That this is so.

BELISARIUS

ACT IV

BELISARIUS. Swear him upon the Book,
That I may hear the crash of thunderbolts
Reverberating truth.

POMPEIUS. No, he is sworn.
Proceed, Demetrius.

BELISARIUS (*advancing into the middle of the court, tearing up the papers of his counsel*). Fool that I am!
This is no court of law that I am in
To winnow guilt from innocence. A pack
Of unclean jackals, who their courage draw
Each from his neighbour's stink, and so find heart
To hunt the grey old lion to his lair.
So be it, then. I had a reverence
For men of law, as men of action have
For brain and tongue; what reverence for you?
This is a fight, and fighting is my game;
I'm used to odds, moreover. Come, you curs!
Come, Master Jackal! come, Demetrius!
One at a time's the rules, but you, like vermin,
Swarm altogether. Come, I'll break your back!
Come! Come!

DEMETRIUS (*shrinking back*). The court protects me.

POMPEIUS.

Seize the man!

BELISARIUS (*shaking off the Soldier who approaches*). Hands off,
you fellow! Do you think I mean
To try a hand's toss with that puny wretch,
That little poisonous adder? Let him go
Belly-wise all his life, and safe for me.
That evidence of his is laughable.
I hail him at street corners, I inquire
For his support, approval of my plans,
Whatever plans those might be? Ask yourselves
If it is folly? I have stood alone
And on my own feet, many years enough
To be an Emperor, had I the mind,
Without Demetrius.

JUSTINIAN (*drawing back the curtains of the alcove*). Out of your
mouth,
Out of your own mouth, Belisarius,
Are you condemned.

ISAAC. It's treason! Damnable!

BELISARIUS. What, is it treason to say "Emperor"—
The simple syllables, without a bow,
Prostrations—genuflexion? Well, you know
I've given those at your requirement,
As everything besides. The day I brought
Vitiges captive to the Hippodrome,

I knelt before you, that, to do the same,
His Gothic spirit might the less rebel;
For I, who might have been his King—his King
Without your help, Demetrius—did bow
To own my Emperor.

JUSTINIAN.

It's as I feared.

Since those poor savages proposed to crown you
Out of their ignorance, you have been blown
With such an unstable and mushroom pride,
That it has warped you from the honest path,
And sent you chasing through the boggy ways
A wispish royalty.

BELISARIUS.

The end, the aim,

The fixed direction of my life has been
To loyalty. Yes, I was proud of that;
And, like a lover, eager to be poor
To see his mistress wear upon her neck
His farms and villas, I have put a passion
In my refusal of life's prizes—felt
A coquetry to wrap my loyalty
In splendid raiment. When in Africa
I captured Gelimar, 'twas in my mind
That I should be more sure upon his seat
Than you sure to unseat me. Do you think
Because I have put these temptations by

BELISARIUS

ACT IV

Made liar and slave of him. I have endured
Many humiliations in the past,
But by the princely honour of my name
You dare not do this. Kill me if you will,
Since that is your intention I must guess.
Am I in love with life, Justinian,
After full forty years of serving you,
And being requited—how?

JUSTINIAN. By being spared
Your forfeit life. Let him be led away,
And kept in prison till my further pleasure;
His goods are confiscated to the State,
And his heirs disinherited.

BELISARIUS. Enough.
You play a devil's game of clemency
To spare my life and mew me behind walls,
And leave my family beggared.

JUSTINIAN. Furthermore——

BELISARIUS. My lord, I have a daughter, young, unwed.
What fate will you condemn her, destitute,
To suffer? Is she guilty of my sins?

JUSTINIAN. Have I not Scripture for my precedent?
You should have thought of that ere you conspired.
Hear yet the punishment. Cut off from light,

You may find truer light within your soul
By the grace of God. Put out his eyes.

BELISARIUS.

You jest.

JUSTINIAN. In such a matter, no.

BELISARIUS.

In such a matter

It can be nothing but a jest. To blind me,
Put me in prison, confiscate my all?
A jest! a jest! But yet a fearful jest.
There's nothing here speaks of reality.
I serve you, you befriend me, forty years;
Misunderstandings, soreness—what of that?
The lien lasts a lifetime. Lately, even
You called me from the calm of my old age
When you had need of me; and suddenly
I am confronted with a charge of treason,
Find myself inexplicably condemned,
And hear you order——

JUSTINIAN.

Take the man away.

BELISARIUS. To prison? And to blind me?

JUSTINIAN.

You forget

Your life is forfeit.

BELISARIUS.

What of that? My life?

My life has been adventured scores of times

BELISARIUS

ACT IV

On your behalf. Good Christ, my life is yours;
To die's my business. But dishonour, no!
Blindness and chains, like an unruly slave
Or savage beast. You will not treat me worse
Than those I conquered for you? If I boast,
Necessity is my excuse, God knows.
You did not mean this?

JUSTINIAN.

Let him be removed.

(The Soldiers advance, but hang back before BELISARIUS'S threatening look.)

BELISARIUS. What! shall I curse you now, Justinian?
Shall I take God in solemn covenant
To witness how you wrong me? Shall I call
The plagues of heaven on that old body of yours
That the grave gapes for? Shall I be dragged from you
With such hot imprecations on my lips,
Shall shrivel up your nights with dreams of fire?

JUSTINIAN. Take him away.

BELISARIUS.

No, you shall hear me out.

Since service goes for nothing, impudence
Shall have its way for once; I will speak out,
Who've held my tongue for half a century,
And tell you—Ah, you cowering old man!
You are my debtor; go your ways and die,

I will not speak with you. I curse you not.
Let me be blind ! It is a pleasant thing
To have shut eyes on this vile world of ours ;
And as for prison, why, it shall smell sweet
For the corruption I have dwelt among,
Here, in Byzantium.

JUSTINIAN (*waving feebly to the Soldiers*). Take him away.

[BELISARIUS is led out by the guard.]

SCENE 2.—*A Street in Byzantium, as in Act I.*

*Enter BELISARIUS, blind, and leaning heavily on a stick,
led by two Soldiers.*

1ST SOLDIER. Where shall we put you ?

BELISARIUS. Put me in the sun.

2ND SOLDIER. The prison damp has got into his bones.
This stretch of wall is clean. How will it do ?

BELISARIUS. Your eyes must judge for me.

1ST SOLDIER (*guiding him to a seat on the steps by a colonnade*).
So, this way, then.

Why, there you are, stretch out your right hand now,
And you may sit down when you have a mind.

BELISARIUS

ACT IV

BELISARIUS. I thank you, friends.

FIRST SOLDIER. Small thanks enough, I think,
To treat you so.

BELISARIUS. I have had friends in my time
To treat me worse. Have you not led me here
As sons a father, placed me in the sun,
Found me a seat, talked courteously? Why,
At least I have learnt gratitude of late.

2ND SOLDIER. It's worth our ears to be heard talking so,
But we've said to each other times enough
That you had all our sympathy.

BELISARIUS.
I'm richer than I thought.

Good faith!

1ST SOLDIER. Quick, here there comes
The Lord Demetrius ; we'd better go.

2ND SOLDIER. I'll spread a cloak here for you.

1ST SOLDIER. Here's a bowl
To hold out to the passers-by.

[He puts a beggar's bowl into BELISARIUS's hand, and exit with 2nd Soldier, leaving BELISARIUS standing propped against a pillar, his stick in one hand and the bowl in the other.]

Enter DEMETRIUS, followed by a Slave carrying a folding stool.

DEMETRIUS.

Who's here?

What, Belisarius?

BELISARIUS (*turning his head in the direction of DEMETRIUS*).

Demetrius ?

DEMETRIUS. You recognize your friends still ?

(To his Slave.) Fellow, here!

Open my stool; I shall sit down awhile
To draw the pretty moral of a tale
From that old beggar, looking like a crow
Perched up there in his dusty, musty rags
Against a marble column.

(The Slave opens the seat, and DEMETRIUS sits opposite

BELISARIUS.)

That old wretch

Was Belisarius the General,
The Scipio, the Cæsar of his day;
The man who came in triumph through the streets—
This street itself, most likely—as reward
For winning victories innumerable;
Who got himself made Consul, and contrived,
All at the same time, to lay up a hoard,
A little darling nest-egg for himself,
To sweeten his old age. Now, fellow, mark

(This will ferment that stale old soul of yours
More than a Lenten sermon) how in vain
The wicked lay up goods corruptible!
For what is left him, now his lady wife
Has shut herself and all her property
Safe in a convent, save a tattered coat
That hardly leaves him decent? Look at him.
Gulp down the moral, it's digestible
If sour in the mouth.

SLAVE. Sir, shall we go?
Is not your business pressing?

DEMETRIUS. If it is
I'll keep it waiting while I sympathize
With one I knew in happier auspices.
Come, Belisarius, no word to say
To one who risks his precious reputation
To be seen chatting with you?

BELISARIUS. Am I used
To bandy words with men that I despise?

DEMETRIUS. So you despise me?

BELISARIUS. Always, as you know;
And never more than now.

SCENE II

BELISARIUS

DEMETRIUS. It was an error,
Strategically, to underrate me, though ;
It was my hand that tipped you off the edge
Into the gutter.

BELISARIUS. It's the gutter stink
That you exude still through your courtly robes.

DEMETRIUS. Good saints! I make no boast of parentage,
Nor think, indeed, one's father matters much
So long as one's the child of Mother Wit.
You've still a barb or two in your old tongue,
And I'll reward you for that quip of yours.
Here (*to the Slave*), take this penny, drop it in his bowl.
It clinks; now curtesy, Belisarius.

(The Slave drops the coin in. BELISARIUS remains motionless.)

You do not fling it out?

BELISARIUS. Demetrius,
I keep it, and the act shall weigh with God
As charity, although hate prompted it.

DEMETRIUS. Be careful, Belisarius.

BELISARIUS. For what?
There's nothing left for me to fear from men.

DEMETRIUS. So low your fortunes have become.

BELISARIUS

ACT IV

BELISARIUS.

So less

Shall fortune touch me.

DEMETRIUS.

It's to me you speak.

I do not give your piety a credit

More than your affectations of the past.

Have I not understood the aim of them?

Your loyalty must, of course, disparage us

And bring us to discredit, who could try

At making our good service serve ourselves. (*Rising.*)

So you sit here, and I, I must not stay,

I'm for the Emperor, who wants me daily.

Shall I give your duty to him, or implore

A pension that may keep you out of rags?

BELISARIUS. No word of mine shall trouble his last years,

But the thought only.

DEMETRIUS (*to his Slave*).

Come, take up my seat.

Have you seen your daughter, Belisarius?

BELISARIUS. My daughter? No!

DEMETRIUS.

She is about the streets.

Ask anyone; they'll know her.

BELISARIUS,

Ah, the lie!

DEMETRIUS. It's well for her she's pretty, and for you——

SLAVE (*interrupting*). My lord, I pray you——

DEMETRIUS. You won't look so lean
Next time we meet if she is filial.

SLAVE. Sir, sir, you should not say this——

DEMETRIUS. Hold your tongue!
(*He turns to go, then comes back.*)
Good-bye; I will inquire of your health
When I have leisure.

BELISARIUS. Go, Demetrius!
There's nothing more between us. Go your way.
Your face is from my sight and from my mind.
I will not hear nor speak with you again.

DEMETRIUS. But every day I'll pass this street, and stop,
And stare, and point at you, and laugh, and say:
"That's Belisarius."

BELISARIUS (*turning away*). So be it then.

DEMETRIUS (*going, to his Slave*). Hurry, you villain, or I shall
be late!

[*Exit DEMETRIUS with his Slave. BELISARIUS left
standing alone; he turns his head as if listening.*]

BELISARIUS. To know that he was gone! What! are you
there?

BELISARIUS

ACT IV

No footsteps. Joannina ! Joannina !
Where is she ?

(He takes several hasty steps forward, but stumbles.)

No, I cannot move a step
In this abhorred and unfamiliar world,
Where all the landmarks of my life are lost.

(He sits on a step with his face hidden.)

*Enter two or three poor folk, a Flower Girl, and an
Orange Girl, the Cobbler, etc.*

FLOWER GIRL. I told you this was my unlucky day ;
There is a beggar perching on the step
I put my basket on.

(Shaking BELISARIUS.)

Get up, old man.

BELISARIUS. Pardon me, I was not aware——

FLOWER GIRL.

Aware !

You know as well as I do there's a law
Of the streets and porticoes we must abide by.
So off that step at once.

COBBLER.

You are a slut ;

Can you not see he's blind ?

FLOWER GIRL. And can't *you* see
My basket's heavy? Every back, I say,
To its own burden.

BELISARIUS (*rising*). Put your basket here.
You will not mind if I shall stand beside it
A little while. How sweet your flowers smell!
Violets are they?

FLOWER GIRL. There are violets there.

BELISARIUS. If I might touch some! We blind folk, you know,
Eke out our pleasures.

(She puts a bunch in his hand.)

They are very cool,
And fragrant of the earth. Had I been Dives,
I would have begged our Father Abraham,
Not for a drop of water, but for these,
Which through the fevered and tormented brain
Do breathe refreshment.

FLOWER GIRL. Pray, sit down again ;
I'll move my basket.

BELISARIUS. Leave it where it is.
Why should you tire those young limbs of yours?
If you would but direct me to a seat
I should be grateful. All my steps are strange;

BELISARIUS

ACT IV

And stumbles, pretty in a child you know,
Are at my age grotesque.

COBBLER (*coming forward*). Give me your hand.
(*Looking at him.*)

That face of yours was known to me somewhere,
Old man ; who are you ?

BELISARIUS (*turning away*). I am what you see—
An old blind beggar.

COBBLER. What's familiar
About your face? You must be very old.

BELISARIUS. To judge from weariness, I am.

COBBLER (*still scrutinizing him*). Why, there,
You do remind me—What's your name, old man?

BELISARIUS. Sir, does the act of courtesy you offered
Give you the leave to probe beneath my rags
For my infirmities?

COBBLER. What is your name?
There, I have got it—you are——

BELISARIUS. Yes, I am
Belisarius!

COBBLER. Oh, God! the same.

ORANGE SELLER. What! what! The General?

ANOTHER.

A-begging too.

FLOWER GIRL. Begging? I knew he was a gentleman
The minute I clapped eyes on him.

ORANGE SELLER.

You did?

Is that the way that you treat gentry, then?

FLOWER GIRL. Sir, will you have my flowers? Here they are,
As many as you wish.

COBBLER.

Oh, grace of God!

That you should be a beggar and want bread!

ANOTHER. He shall not want while I have got a coin
To rattle in my pocket.

COBBLER.

No, nor while

People want shoe-leather, and come to me.

Here, here, my lord!

(He empties his pockets feverishly, pressing the money on

BELISARIUS.)

FLOWER GIRL.

And here!

ORANGE GIRL.

I have no money

As I've sold nothing yet, but take my fruit.

ANOTHER. My lord! my lord!

(They crowd round, putting money into his hands.)

BELISARIUS

ACT IV

BELISARIUS. There, my good people, stop.
It's true that I do beg for charity,
But this is loving-kindness. Take all back.
A penny shall suffice my daily needs;
The rest is superfluity.

Enter IOANNINA.

JOANNINA. What's here?
Whom are you crowding round?

COBBLER. Good-morning, lady.

JOANNINA. You should think shame to mob a poor old man.
Go back, go back!

(She advances to BELISARIUS, the others drawing away with scared looks ; the Cobbler tries to come between her and him.)

COBBLER. Dear little madam, stay !

JOANNINA. What is the matter? (*Seeing BELISARIUS*) Ah!

BELISARIUS. My daughter!

JOANNINA. Father?

BELISARIUS. Do you not know me?

JOANNINA. Oh, your hair is white!
And you are bowed, and where your eyes should be—
Oh, God! oh, God! (*To the crowd*) Must you stand
gaping there
Before our naked misery? Begone!
Pry, peep a-tiptoe elsewhere; let us be,
Or, by the glory and the grace of God,
I shall find heart to curse you.

COBBLER. We will go.
We are not prying, we have done our best
To give what we could spare.

JOANNINA. To give? Give what?

FLOWER GIRL. Our money, small coins only; we are poor,
But he had nothing.

JOANNINA (*seizing BELISARIUS's bowl*). You have given this?
Oh, never! Take it quickly, and be gone.
[The others begin to go out, shamefaced.]

COBBLER. We meant no harm indeed.

BELISARIUS. And there is none.
I thank you for your gifts. Good-bye, good people.
I have had kindness from you.
[Exeunt all but BELISARIUS and JOANNINA.]

BELISARIUS

ACT IV

JOANNINA. Oh, my father !
I kneel before you, hold you by the knees,
Would kiss the dust from your dishonoured feet.

BELISARIUS (*disengaging her arms*). Dishonoured ? How ? My
pride is like a flag,
High above all the street-bemuddled chance
Of circumstance.

JOANNINA. Was not the rest too much
That they add beggary, and you must stand
To have the greasy ha'pence of the street
Thrust in your hand ?

BELISARIUS. It is as honourable
To take the coin my simple needs require
From these good people, whom I have well served,
As to have provinces or posts at Court
For fighting battles. There's another way
Dishonour comes. What are you doing here ?
Why are you not safe locked behind the walls
Of your mother's convent ?

JOANNINA. Not if I should die
Like a dog in the street would I be penned with her,
To hear her peevish wailing all the day
Against my father.

SCENE II

BELISARIUS

BELISARIUS. You do fail in duty.
You should have gone with her.

JOANNINA. Oh, father mine,
How do I, with this love that's in my heart,
Contrive to anger you? How could I go,
Shelter myself behind a convent wall,
Ignorant, careless of your circumstance?

BELISARIUS. You would have spared me this last bitterness.

JOANNINA. What do you mean?

BELISARIUS. What thing must I suppose
To hear that fellow greet you in the street
Familiarly? There, I will not hear,
You shall not utter to the shameless air
What my shame guesses.

JOANNINA. I'd have damned my soul
By self-destruction, rather than have damned
My body in that manner.

BELISARIUS. Is that truth?

JOANNINA. Have you discovered me in lies?

BELISARIUS. Oh, God,
If I could see your face!

JOANNINA (*approaching him again*). Put out of mind
 This nightmare apprehension. I first knew
 That cobbler, taking an old pair of shoes
 To have them mended; he is kind to me
 Out of his love for you, and, as I pass
 Often this way to take the needlework
 By which I learn my living, to great dames—
 My skill in broidery has served me well—
 He will come out to talk with me awhile
 And tell me how he saw you, years ago
 In your gilt armour, with the heaped-up spoils
 Of Africa behind you.

BELISARIUS. Joannina,
 Is this the truth?

JOANNINA. It is.

BELISARIUS. Into my arms;
 Here on my heart! I thought that heart would break
 When I heard such things from Demetrius.
 Let it pass now; it never could be true,
 Not of you, Nina, with those eyes of yours.
 You must forgive me, for you cannot know
 How helpless are the blind;—we guess our way
 Along familiar pavements, and in the speech
 Of our beloved ones.

JOANNINA.

All is well again,

So that you love me.

BELISARIUS.

Could you only know

My thoughts of you these months! There was the
darkness—

That's hard to bear until you're used to it,
To wake in the dark, and stretch out groping hands,
See naught, hear naught, to feel you're in a tomb
Until the rustle of a rat in the straw
Tells you it's life; then rushes misery
Up to your lips, a flood: drink it you must.
But worst of all was your uncertain fate,
The muck of the world, and the hog nature of man
To roll you in it—then indeed I've raved!

JOANNINA. Shall God forget this to Justinian?

BELISARIUS. Hush, all is ended; and of less account

Than the old story of the fall of Troy.

A curtain shuts the past out; all behind
Grows dim and misty, all my ancient wars,
My victories, the triumph through the streets,
These very streets, all faded; there fade, too,
Old heartaches, weariness, the sick despair
At fresh misunderstandings every turn,
Failure foredoomed, plans thwarted—let them lie:

BELISARIUS

ACT IV

I have you safe, and so all's well again,
And I content to sit here by the wall
And stretch my hands in the sun as old men do.

JOANNINA (*kneeling beside him as he sits*).
How cold your hands are !

BELISARIUS. It's the fever fit
Wears out and leaves me.

JOANNINA. They are cold as death.
I'll warm them in my bosom.

BELISARIUS. No, my child,
They will but strike a chill into your heart.
When will the old refrain from shadowing
Young eyes, young lives? Had I but thought of that
When I denied you Anastasius.

JOANNINA (*very softly*). Ah, him!

BELISARIUS. What of him, then?

JOANNINA. No word at all.

BELISARIUS. I felt you stir beside me. We blind folk
Grow very cunning. What of him, my love?

JOANNINA. Nothing of him.

BELISARIUS. You have acquired the right
To bar me from your confidence.

JOANNINA. A bar ?
There shall be none between us. He proposed
An honourable marriage once again,
But never would the Emperor consent
That he should wed me, and I could not go,
Uncertain of your fate or of your needs,
Into a far strange country.

BELISARIUS. That is love,
And yet reproach as well ; the wrong I did you
Remains to sting me.

JOANNINA. Will you make me weep,
Adding another unjust accusation
To all?

BELISARIUS. No tears ; let's have no more complaint.
Such small things shall amuse me : to sit here,
Guessing the footsteps as they pass me by,
A silken lady's, or a little lad's——
There is a soldier's ! (*Rising.*)
Help me to my feet ;
I'll die upright—that's as a soldier should.

BELISARIUS

ACT IV

Enter ANASTASIUS.

JOANNINA. Help, Anastasius, my father falls !

(They support him to a seat.)

BELISARIUS *(wandering)*.

Where is my sword ? Here, Unigatus, here !

Plague on the fellow ! Where's my sword, I say ?

(Recovering.)

Are you there, Nina ? All my wit's at large ;

The actual and the fanciful grow one

To sightless eyes. It does seem very strange

To miss a sword-blade slapping at my thigh

At every movement.

ANASTASIUS.

Yes, it well may do.

BELISARIUS. That's Anastasius ? Then all is well ;

You are the only man to whom I owe

Something—a reparation. I broke faith,

Suffered as much from it, perhaps, as you.

If you forgive me, my account is squared

With all the world.

ANASTASIUS.

There shall not be a word

Of pardon, sir, but only of my respect.

BELISARIUS. Then death's procrastinated long enough

Somehow to pay life's debt.

JOANNINA.

You will not die?

BELISARIUS. You would not have me live?

ANASTASIUS.

Living with us,

And by your son's and daughter's loving care,
Tread honourable old age.

BELISARIUS.

Not so, by God!

Because I have been a beggar on the streets
Must Anastasius do charity,
Making of our relationship an alms?

JOANNINA. Is my love nothing to you?

BELISARIUS.

Oh, my girl!

Your love is the one salvage of life's wreck;
Your love is the one candle in the gloom
That's pressing on me; your beloved voice
Steadies my soul, which totters like a child
Towards the future. What's your love to me?
God's truth, it is my only recompense
For sixty bitter years of weariness,
Sins done, faith broken, many wrongs endured.
First there was Theodosius, I learned
To recognize ingratitude through him;
And Theodora followed me with hate;
And Antonina—how the old wounds smart!—
Julian, too, and Unigatus—he!

And ever, every turn, the Emperor,
At every moment of my life. Oh, God,
I am a querulous old man.

JOANNINA (*taking him in her arms*). Lean here,
'Tis I that hold you, father.

BELISARIUS. Young, strong arms,
They hold me at the last. Should I complain?
Some men there are who have had much of life,
Honour, success, rewards, trust—even that!
Yet lacked such love as yours, so at the last
Were poorer than myself.

JOANNINA. Go, summon here
A litter, Anastasius.

BELISARIUS. Let be!
I'll die out in the sun and open air;
A bed-death is no soldier's end, you know;
And I'm a soldier: let the Emperor say
What other man with such inadequate,
Poor, miserable means had done my work,
And from the foot of Etna to the Po,
And in five years, subdued what Rome acquired
In her first centuries.

ANASTASIUS. If you will send
A message to Justinian, I swear
To give it.

BELISARIUS. Tell him—tell him—nothing at all.
All's done for ever between him and me ;
I served him, he disgraced me ; well, no matter,
He doubtless was misled. I broke my sword,
Not my allegiance. *(He falls back.)*

JOANNINA. Anastasius !
Help me, he's failing !

BELISARIUS. Voices, voices, voices.
Ninetta, could I only see your face
But once again, and sunshine on the streets.
Speak to me.

JOANNINA. Oh, for words ! My tongue is mute,
But my heart crying like a mother bird
Over her empty nest. His breath comes faint.

BELISARIUS. Tell nothing to the Emperor, not a word.
(He dies.)



BY THE SAME AUTHOR

Small crown 8vo., cloth, 3s. 6d. net

THE DELUGE, & OTHER POEMS

EXTRACTS FROM REVIEWS

"Mr. Presland is a writer of considerable gifts. . . . In this little collection of verse he tries many styles—sonnet, ballad, lyric, etc.—and they all show accomplishment."—*Times*.

"All Mr. Presland writes is written with naturalness and grace, and the range of his knowledge and interests is wide. . . . It contains much very good verse."—*Daily News*.

"'The Deluge' is dramatic, but short . . . and it is good poetry. There are other poems and sonnets in the book which will be much appreciated."—*Graphic*.

"A volume of real poetry. . . . It contains a finely-worded short poetic drama, some dignified sonnets, and various lyrics, all on a high plane of thought and execution."—*Morning Leader*.

"The first poem . . . is a weird and powerful phantasy. . . . The dramatic power of the piece is remarkable; there are some fine lyrics for the chorus, and the first scene opens with an exquisite serenade."—*Liverpool Post*.

"This slender volume contains some beautiful thoughts beautifully expressed."—*Evening Standard*.

"Clearly and powerfully written. . . . The work is always both accomplished and strong in craftsmanship, and earnest in thought. The book cannot but win new readers for its author beyond the circle of those whom his poetical plays have taught to look with good expectation for further work from his hand."—*Scotsman*.

"Beautifully written. . . . We recommend Mr. Presland's latest to lovers of poetry."—*Sheffield Telegraph*.

"The poet has written nothing more serenely beautiful. . . . Here, unless we are mistaken, is a singer whose voice will carry beyond his own generation."—*Literary World*.

"Impressive. . . . Although short, it shows again the dramatic skill which the author has proved in previous works. Perhaps the gem of the volume is the poem descriptive of the tapestry of the firmament and human destiny. Much grace and charm characterize the sonnets. . . . The story of King Richard's proud disdain and his imprisonment makes a stirring ballad."—*Nottingham Guardian*.

"The many admirers of John Presland's previous work will fully appreciate his new volume. Within its covers are to be found many passages of real dramatic power and beauty."—*Publishers' Circular*.

LONDON: CHATTO & WINDUS

BY THE SAME AUTHOR

Fcap. 4to., cloth, 5s. net

JOAN OF ARC

EXTRACTS FROM REVIEWS

"An excellent drama. . . . The verse is always flexible, and at the right moment rises into the atmosphere of poetry in which Shakespeare moves with such freedom. . . . Joan is the soul and centre of the play, and the author has done nobly by her. We catch, as we read, some of the infection that fell upon men's souls from her presence . . . which simply means that Mr. Presland has realized his historical characters so well as to make them seem living. . . . What we have written is sufficient to show with what dramatic truth and poetic sympathy the dramatist has approached his great subject, and with what success he has handled it."—*Glasgow Herald*.

"Mr. Presland has put some excellent workmanship into this new dramatic picture of the Maid of Orleans. . . . The action never flags. The verse is fluid, natural, yet dignified, and adapts itself easily to the varying requirements of the situations. . . . A play which leaves in the reader's mind a picture that grows upon him. One forgets everything but Joan, and that not because of any lack of proportion in the composition, but because of the naturalness and force of her beautiful character."—*Bibliophile*.

"At once good drama and good poetry. . . . The well-known story is deftly treated. The verse is easy and vigorous—above all, it is dramatic."—*Sheffield Daily Telegraph*.

"Mr. Presland's play shows how impressive Joan of Arc may be made as the central figure in a 'history.' . . . Written with faithful adherence to Shakespearean traditions of form, it follows out in an interesting sequence of scenes the several stages in the career of the Maid of Orleans. . . . The piece is all the more impressive because it does not bring in any invented theatrical love interest, or anything of that sort, to confuse the simple lines of the accepted story."—*Scotsman*.

"Written in language which will commend itself to all educated people, who will certainly not only be entertained, but instructed thereby. The author has done his work excellently in every way."—*Road*.

LONDON: SIMPKIN, MARSHALL & CO.

BY THE SAME AUTHOR

Fcap. 4to., cloth, 5s. net

MARY, QUEEN OF SCOTS

EXTRACTS FROM REVIEWS

"Mr. Presland appears to be following in the footsteps of Schiller. . . . Considered generally, Mr. Presland's drama is a fine piece of work. Excellent in its presentation of character, impressive in sentiment, and dignified in metre, it lacks none of the greater qualities of the historical drama. . . ."—*Scotsman*.

"The author remains as simple and dignified in style as in his treatment of the tragedy of 'Joan of Arc.' There is no painful straining after effect. Act V. is really powerful."—*Evening Standard*.

"Mr. Presland gives promise of becoming one of the most successful living writers of poetic drama. His 'Joan of Arc,' we have reason to remember; his 'Queen Mary' is no less striking. There is no Swinburnian welter of poetry here, but a very dramatically presented study of a very baffling woman. It would be difficult for anyone to cavil at the poet's presentation of the time. . . . Nothing could be finer, from a dramatic point of view, than her acting after the murder of Rizzio. . . . The last act is a splendid bit of work; the savagery of the street song and the last speech of Mary before signing her abdication are equally dramatic and equally poetic on very diverse lines. The play is altogether noteworthy."—*Glasgow Herald*.

"... It would, in our estimation, be a decided acquisition to any actor-manager who could arrange with the author to allow him to produce it. . . . Space does not permit us to deal with it here as we would like to do, or as it deserves, but we with pleasure commend it to our readers in the most emphatic way. . . ."—*Road*.

"... 'Mary, Queen of Scots,' a work in which he equals and even exceeds his marked success in dramatizing a theme from the history of the heroic Maid of Orleans. . . . Its progress is well planned, and it proceeds with spirit, several of the scenes being splendidly dramatic. As literature the play is sustained at a high level in strong nervous verse. . . . The characters are firmly drawn and lifelike. . . ."—*Liverpool Daily Post*.

LONDON: CHATTO & WINDUS

BY THE SAME AUTHOR

Fcap. 4to., cloth, 5s. net

MANIN AND THE DEFENCE OF VENICE

EXTRACTS FROM REVIEWS

" . . . The play is genuinely dramatic, and its impressiveness is heightened by the dignity of the blank verse. There is poetry on every page, but the effects are gained, not by flaunting rhetoric, but by simplicity of language, which is forcible through its truth. . . . We can only advise those who love English verse to read this play; they will see that poetry is still a living thing among us."—*Oxford Magazine*.

"Mr. Presland follows up his dramas 'Joan of Arc' and 'Mary, Queen of Scots' with a picture, at once moving and terrible, of the siege of Venice by the Austrians in 1849. . . . He has once more proved himself a dramatist of that high poetic order which we have so often been told died out with the eighteenth century."—*Literary World*.

"His new work condenses into four acts of vigorous and flexible blank verse, always animated in movement, and skilfully wrought together into a fine unity of action. . . . Mr. Presland's Manin is an impressive, pathetic figure, and the play one which cultured readers should follow with unqualified interest."—*Scotsman*.

" . . . The poetry never clogs the action, and the whole play is tense with the struggle in the soul of the hero. . . . The play thus becomes the tragedy of a city but the triumph of a man, and the interplay of the two ideas is finely wrought out. It is not all sombre, but even the gayest of its characters throbs to the heart-beat of Italy, and helps to give unity to the drama."—*Glasgow Herald*.

"Written in blank verse, that is both flexible and dramatic, the author gives an effect of spaciousness, combined with tense feeling."—*Publishers' Circular*.

"In the unfolding of the story Mr. Presland shows much greater genius than he did in either of his two previous dramatic works. . . . The verse is most flexible, and practically all through he moves with great freedom and reaches real dignity; the action seldom flags, and the whole work is truly dramatic. Especially might we pick out the last act as extremely powerful."—*Sheffield Telegraph*.

"Throughout this admirable piece of dramatic work there is clear evidence of the author's extraordinary power as a delineator in poetic drama of human character in its many phases. His 'Joan of Arc' was a work which one could not fail to remember by reason of its striking characteristics; but we are convinced that remembrance of the 'Defence of Venice' will be equally, if not more, indelible."—*Cape Argus*.

LONDON: CHATTO & WINDUS

BY THE SAME AUTHOR

Fcap. 4to., cloth, 5s. net

MARCUS AURELIUS

EXTRACTS FROM REVIEWS

"Mr. Presland has followed up his historical plays on 'Joan of Arc,' 'Mary, Queen of Scots,' and 'Manin and the Defence of Venice,' with a dramatic rendering of an event in the life of the Emperor-philosopher which will go far to establish him at the head of present-day writers of blank-verse drama. . . . Mr. Presland displays not only dramatic qualities of a high order, but, what is more rare, a fine instinct for dignity and impressiveness."—*Scotsman*.

"Another historical poetic drama from a writer whose work always shows taste and sincerity."—*Times*.

"Mr. John Presland has gained a reputation as a poetic dramatist of considerable attainments, and his new drama should maintain, if it does not enhance, this reputation."—*Sheffield Telegraph*.

"A delicate play, not lacking in power or pathos."—*Daily Mail*.

"It is a genuine pleasure to read such sincere and tasteful works as Mr. Presland's historical poetic drama, 'Marcus Aurelius'. . . . There are many passages that plead for quotation."—*Pall Mall Gazette*.

"'Marcus Aurelius' is a poem and must not be tossed aside as a mere versification. The theme is a great one, the situations are well imagined, the conversation is natural and poetical. There is, as the end approaches, a truly moving and even magnificent scene."—*Expository Times*.

"The whole is equally moving as a play and as a poem—as a play it is rich in dramatic situation, as a poem it abounds in noble thoughts nobly attired."—*Glasgow Herald*.

"Mr. Presland has written a fine play in dignified and graceful verse."—*Tablet*.

"The action is well sustained and moves with a fine swing, from Cassius' triumphant entry into Rome to the suicide of Faustina following his death at Antioch."—*Athenæum*.

LONDON : CHATTO & WINDUS

Small crown 8vo., cloth, 3s. 6d. net

SONGS OF CHANGING SKIES

LONDON : CHATTO & WINDUS

